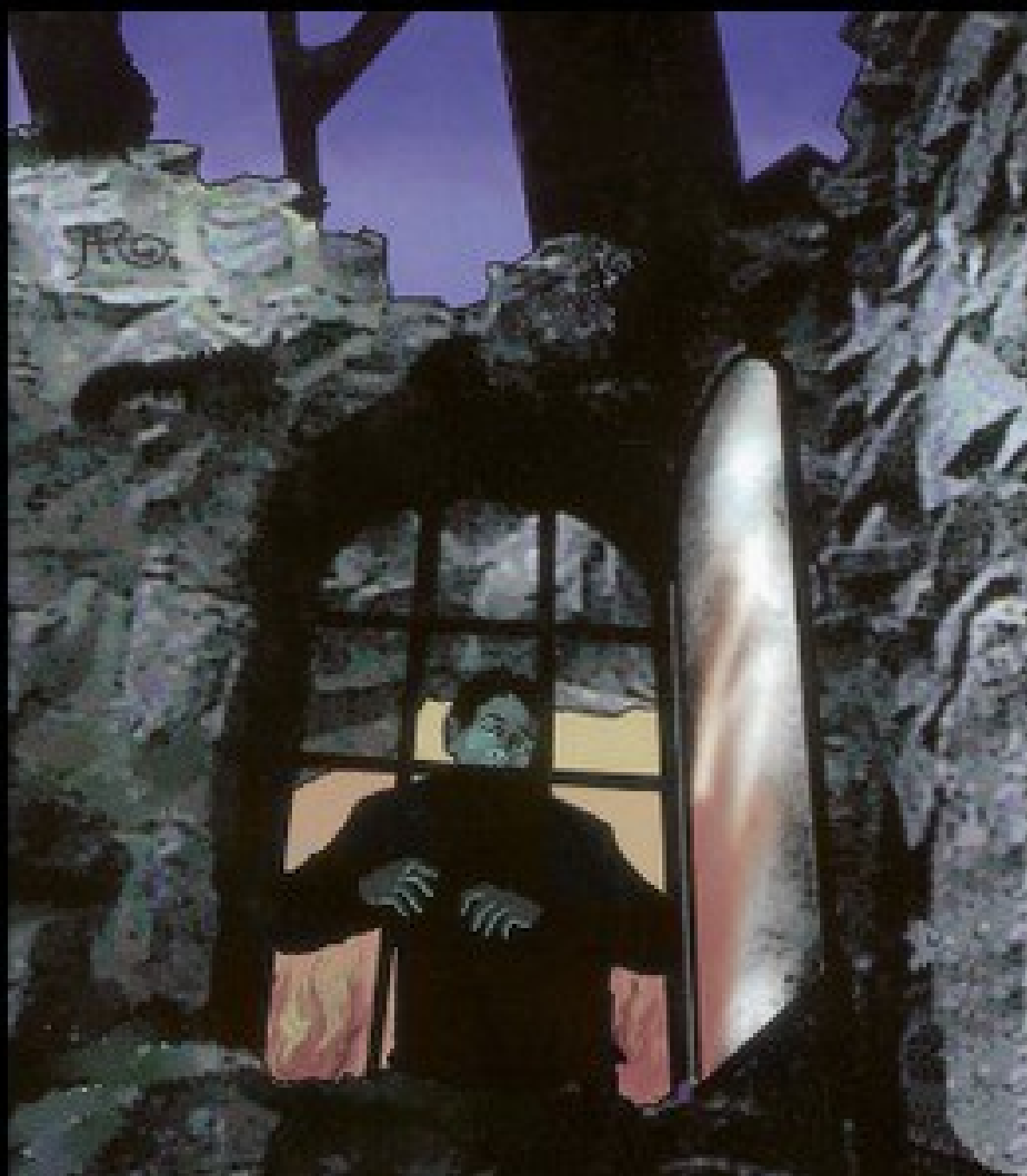


# THE INVESTIGATORS in

## THE TRAIL OF THE LAST MANUSCRIPT





in

**THE TRAIL  
OF THE  
LAST MANUSCRIPT**

Who's Johnny? And why did he disappear? The three detectives from Rocky Beach are faced with an almost unsolvable task. They are to find an unknown man and hand him a letter that leads to an unknown treasure. The anonymous message lures The Three Investigators into the wilderness of Kings Canyon National Park and to a mysterious Black Tower. Suddenly the situation becomes dangerous—Jupiter, Pete and Bob are ambushed. Someone is trying to stop their mission. Will the three detectives be able to help Johnny?

The Three Investigators  
in  
The Trail of the Last Manuscript

*Original German text by  
Ben Nevis*

*Based on characters created by  
Robert Arthur*

*Translated, adapted, and edited from:*

*Die drei ???: Feuerturm*

*(The Three ???: Fire Tower)*

*by*

*Ben Nevis*

*(1999)*

*Cover art by*

*Aiga Rasch*

*(2020-03-18)*

## **Contents**

- 1. A Mysterious Package**
- 2. A Black Mercedes**
- 3. The Unknown Sender**
- 4. Into the Wilderness**
- 5. Off Limits**
- 6. The King's Message**
- 7. The Battle of Culloden**
- 8. The Bear is Loose**
- 9. The Black Tower**
- 10. No More Fun**
- 11. Encounter in the Night**
- 12. Milady Appears**
- 13. Fire!**
- 14. A Daring Theory**
- 15. A Bitter Disappointment**
- 16. The Bear Hunter**
- 17. Johnny**
- 18. A New Case?**

## 1. A Mysterious Package

Jupiter rose and brushed the sand off his bathing trunks. “And is this really supposed to be for us?” he asked curiously.

The little boy nodded and held out the package out to him. It was in a brown wrapping paper, slightly larger than a normal letter. But what caught Jupiter’s eye on the front of the package were three large question marks—the identification mark of The Three Investigators.

Jupiter took the package... and turned it in his hands. It was sealed with a wide adhesive tape. It didn’t say who it was from. The thick paper crackled in Jupiter’s hands. Puzzled, the First Investigator looked at the little boy who was impatiently stepping from one foot to the other. “Who told you to bring us this package?”

“A man. I’ve never seen him before. He looked like...” The boy looked around the beach and finally shrugged his shoulders. “... like a man.”

“Uh-huh.” Jupiter grimaced. On this sunny afternoon, hundreds of men were on the beach at Rocky Beach. “Could you be a bit more specific? Height, hair colour, age, clothing...”

Bob, who had been crouching in the sand listening until now, jumped up. “Gee, Jupe, give him a break. Not everyone has the detective-trained powers of observation that you have—even though you started off young.” Then he turned to the boy. “What’s your name?”

“Chris. Uh... you’re detectives?” The boy, about seven years old, looked at Bob with interest.

“Sure, Chris! We call ourselves The Three Investigators. This is Jupiter, I’m Bob. And we’ll investigate anything.”

The boy opened his eyes. “You... you are The Three Investigators? The famous detectives? That’s why the question marks are on the package! But where is the third of you?” He pointed past Bob. “Is that him?”

Bob turned to the beach towel under which his friend was lolling in the sand. “Yes, that is Pete. He’s a little tired today. Of course, he’s usually the most athletic of the three of us.”

From Pete’s direction, a slight grunt sounded.

“Chris, you’ll have to excuse him,” Bob grinned. “Pete caught a virus.”

“Rubbish,” contradicted Jupiter. “He was out too late last night with his girlfriend Kelly. And now he has a headache, suffers from lack of sleep and looks pale despite his tan.”

Bob nodded. “He hasn’t eaten today either. Very strange,” he said emphatically out loud.

Again a mumbling sound came out from under the beach towel. “We’ve been watching... TV too long...” were the only words that made sense.

Bob kicked a load of sand on Pete’s legs. “Well, why should I believe you? What was on TV that was so exciting?”

There was no answer.

Bob shook his head. “Just be glad your parents didn’t see you this morning. Otherwise you’d be in bed, sipping chamomile tea instead of hanging around the beach...”

“... And spread out in our precious shadow.” Jupiter winked at Bob. “He doesn’t even have eyes for the greatest girls today. He must be in serious trouble...”

“Well, apparently his night with Kelly gave him the rest...” Bob jumped a step aside to be on the safe side.

But Pete just coughed and turned his back on them. “Shut up!” Pete hit back. “Always these stupid comments, just because you cucumbers don’t stand a chance with the girls!”

Chris listened silently to the exchange of blows. Bob smiled at him. “So that is our Pete. So tell me. What did the man with the package say to you?”

“That he could not come to you himself. He also gave me an ice cream as a reward.”

“Take another look around,” Bob said. “Maybe he’s watching us right now. Do you see him anywhere?”

Chris let his eyes wander over the colourful hustle and bustle on the beach. Finally, he shrugged his shoulders at a loss. “No, I really don’t see him. He isn’t here any more.”

“Is he that guy over there, looking over at us?” Jupiter interrupted him.

“Crazy Mike? No, not him.”

Bob nodded. “Sure, you would have recognized him. After all, everybody in Rocky Beach knows him. He always shows up at the beach and gets people into strange conversations. But he’s all right. Even though I don’t believe he has a psychology practice.”

“True,” Jupiter agreed with his friend. “At least he hasn’t registered a practice. I checked it out sometime ago.”

From Pete’s direction, a quiet snoring could be heard again.

“Hey, Pete!” Bob tickled his foot. No response.

“All right, Chris. Thanks for the package,” said Jupiter and took a break.

Chris looked at him questioningly. “Okay, but aren’t you going to open it?”

“Yes, of course, later.” Jupiter threw the brown package next to Pete’s surfboard, which was stuck in the sand.

Disappointed, Chris turned away.

“Come on, Juve,” Bob grumbled and then called out to the little boy: “Chris, wait a moment. We’ll open the package together!”

“I’m sure there’s a new case lurking here!” Jupiter contradicted and drilled his foot into the sand.

“Case? Is there a new case?” Pete suddenly sat upright in the sand. But the movement had probably been a little too jerky. He immediately touched his stomach. “Ouhh...”

“Yes, a case, Pete,” said Jupiter stretched. “But get some sleep.”

“Maybe we should have sent you to the UK with our class,” Bob said. “A little walking in the mountain air would have done you good, and the colour of your cheeks could be...”

Pete took a deep breath. “I’ve had enough of your nonsense! Still better to hang around here in California than to freeze to death in cold and rainy Britain. I’m really not very keen on that. No, I don’t envy our classmates. And by tomorrow at the latest, I’ll be fit again.”

“Bravo, Pete! A really long sentence!” Bob clapped his hands. “His life spirits return! However, the student exchange with our special ‘European Regionalism’ course would certainly have been exciting. Because I would love to visit castles, especially haunted ones.”

“Not me! I want to hear the Californian sea roar. I want to enjoy the sun,” Pete let himself fall back and looked at the sky. “I only went to that stupid class because of Juve and you. Nobody in Rocky Beach would be interested in such a wacky topic. Thankfully we didn’t go to the UK with the rest of the class. I’d rather be stuck here with Juve—even though he was pretty nasty to me!”

“Hmm...” Jupiter Jones preferred not to comment on that remark. His uncle Titus had not been able to spare the money for the visit to the British partner school.



The Jones Salvage Yard, where The Three Investigators had set up their headquarters for their detective business, was not making much money at the moment. And the school's funding budget had been completely used up at a sports tournament to mark the school's 75th anniversary. Pete's father had offered to advance the money, but neither Jupiter nor his uncle Titus would accept.

Finally, Bob and Pete had decided to stay with their friend in Rocky Beach. So the class had flown to the UK without them and the three of them had a week off school instead.

"Britain won't run away from us," Jupe said after a pause. "One of these days we'll go there. After all, we are young and life lies before us like an unread book."

"Sometimes you sound like your own grandfather," Bob grinned and picked up the brown package. "But now we're finally opening the package. For it too lies before us like an unread book. Come on, Chris, let's check this out!"

## 2. A Black Mercedes

Bob dug a pocket knife out of the cooler bag and slowly scratched the bottom of the package—a precaution, in case there was something else in there. Then he pulled out a sheet of paper and an envelope.

“Surprise!” cried Bob, waving the envelope around. In big letters, it said ‘DO NOT OPEN’.

“Come on, come on!” Jupiter impatiently took the sheet of paper from Bob’s hand and unfolded it, and read it out in a monotonous voice:

*Dear Sirs,*

*As you can see, an envelope is enclosed with this note. PLEASE DO NOT OPEN IT! THAT WOULD BE DANGEROUS! As I am threatened, I cannot deliver this envelope myself. It contains a message that is very important for a specific person. That person is in danger!*

*Please forward the letter UNOPENED. The name of the recipient is also the password: ‘Johnny’. The meeting point is at the corner of Carey Street and Arden Street at 9 pm tonight.*

*Gentlemen, you have the reputation of running a successful detective agency and I rely on your discretion and reliability. Excuse me if I don’t want to reveal my name for security reasons. If the delivery is successful, I will of course be identified.*

*Thank you.*

*Yours truly,  
The Sender*

“Hmm,” Bob said after a brief pause. “Anonymous. If a man won’t give his name...”

“Carey Street and Arden Street—they are in the industrial area,” mumbled Jupiter. “It’s not very cosy in the evening. What do you think about this, Bob? Sounds weird.”

“I agree. Also, how did he know we were running a detective agency?”

Chris, who had listened with interest the whole time, interfered. “The Three Investigators are known to many people. After all, you’ve solved many cases. I even read about it on the Internet.”

Bob blushed. “Yes, I know, uh... thanks for the praise. Jupe, maybe we should look at the enclosed envelope.”

Jupiter nodded and examined the envelope. “It’s glued down firmly. We can’t get it open with steam. The recipient would definitely notice it.”

“No, we should let it be,” Pete intervened. Bob and Jupe flinched. “I am in favour of us doing everything exactly as the message says. Fellas, we are in the middle of a new secret! I find it exciting!”

“What if this whole thing is a joke, Pete? Or if it’s really dangerous,” Bob asked sceptically.

“No, no, we can’t lose anything by it!” Pete said. “We should just carry out the instructions first. And after we deliver the envelope, we track the recipient. If it is true that the sender and the recipient are in danger, then we can help them. Maybe that’s why the package was sent to us. A hidden call for help, so to speak. We’ll know more by tonight at the latest.”

“But what if Skinny Norris and his gang are behind this?” Bob was still not convinced. After all, Skinny had often annoyed them.

Jupiter shook his head. “Skinny should still be at his boarding school now. Besides, he would not have written the letter in that tone. Look, the sender has an interesting choice of words—‘reputation’, ‘discretion’, ‘reliability’. Skinny can’t even spell these words. He would have made up some crazy things.”

Bob then turned to the little boy. “Chris, roughly how old is the man who gave you this letter?” he asked.

“Thirty, no doubt,” Chris replied. “Perhaps a bit older.”

“All right.” Bob said.

A woman, who was shouting the name ‘Chris’ loudly, trudged through the sand at some distance. She stopped and looked around.

“My mother,” Chris explained. “She’s looking for me.”

Before the boy set off, Bob asked him to come look for them at the same place next weekend and he promised that he would tell exactly how the story ended. Bob waved goodbye to Chris and then turned around.

“Okay,” he said. “So let’s take part in this messenger game. But first we’re gonna check out the area. I’d say only one of us delivers the envelope. One hides nearby and one waits in the car so that we can quickly begin the pursuit.”

“If you plan so extensively for us, then you probably already know which of us is the envelope carrier?” Pete asked.

“I thought of you for that!” Bob said.

“Oh, no, Bob,” Pete countered. “We should decide by rock-paper-scissors.”

“Agreed,” said Jupiter. “Bob, bow to the majority.”

“If you must...” Bob said.

As expected, Bob lost.

The hands of Bob’s watch approached 9 pm. He took a deep breath and got out of Pete’s MG.

They had driven through the industrial area for a while and had taken a close look at the area. But they hadn’t noticed anything special. Nevertheless, what had sounded like child’s play on the sunny beach now turned out to be a very unpleasant task.

Deserted, the buildings loomed out of the dark. To Bob, they seemed eerie, almost threatening. The street lights bathed the scene with a cool, pale light. Anxious, Bob took his post. It was lonely here, nobody had appeared for a long time.

Bob kept an eye on the building across the street. It seemed particularly suspicious to him. Then he looked towards Pete’s car which was about fifty metres away. Jupiter had already got out at the other end of the block to sneak unobtrusively to one of the containers around Bob.

A while later, Bob heard the Red-bellied Flycatcher call—the secret bird-call of The Three Investigators. This was from Jupiter, signalling to Bob that he had reached his observation post.

The envelope in Bob's shirt pocket crackled. Perhaps it had been a mistake not to open it? Nervously Bob looked at his watch. Only a few seconds left until 9 pm—and still no one in sight.

That's when Bob heard the engine sound of a car approaching. The car turned around the corner. A black Mercedes slowly went past Pete, who had ducked away, and now came towards Bob. He saw that the driver wore sunglasses despite the darkness.

Bob stood ready to jump and tensed his muscles. Was that the time? He heard Pete start his car. The black car slowed down. As it went slowly towards Bob, only then he realized that it was a woman driving the Mercedes. She turned her head to him briefly and Bob noticed her reddish hair. Then she accelerated and drove on.

Helplessly Bob looked at Pete, who had turned off the engine again. A thousand questions buzzed through his head: Was the woman in the Mercedes the messenger they had been waiting for? Was she 'Johnny'? Had the situation become too hot for her? For what reason? Maybe she just wanted to check the situation and would come back. Bob got more and more nervous.

Then another noise startled him. It came from above. It was the rhythmic rattling of a helicopter. It should be flying quite low, because the rotor noise was very loud. But nothing could be seen yet. Then the helicopter suddenly appeared behind a row of houses. A bright searchlight flashed up and illuminated the space between the buildings. For a moment the beam also fell on Bob.

The detective felt the air whirled up by the rotors. On impulse, he wanted to run away. But then the ordeal was over, as suddenly as it had begun. When he seemed to sense that Bob needed moral support, Pete briefly flashed his lights. Jupiter also let his bird call be heard. Bob relaxed a little.

It was almost 9:30 pm. The handover had apparently failed. And they slowly had to go home. Just as Bob was about to leave his post, he heard another car approaching.

When Bob saw that car turn around the corner and drive past Pete, he almost collapsed. It was a police car. "If this 'Johnny' comes now, it's over for good," Bob thought. "Hopefully the police officers will go away soon."

The cops stopped a few metres away. A blond policeman got out. The second one stayed in the car.

"Evening, young man!" the policeman asked. "May I ask what you're doing here?"

Bob swallowed. "Uh, evening, officer. I'm waiting for a friend."

"Friend? Maybe that one over there in the car?" The policeman pointed to the car that Pete was in.

"Uh, yeah, that's right," Bob stammered. "That's him over there."

"Well, let's get your friend over here." The uniformed man waved Pete over to him.

Pete started the car and drove up. He got out and joined them. At that moment, Jupiter also appeared from behind.

"A reunion, huh?" the policeman's voice became sarcastic. "How many more of you are hiding here?"

"No one else," Bob explained. "Honest."

"So tell me, what's going on?" the policeman asked.

"We, uh, we are detectives," replied Jupiter after a short hesitation. "We are waiting for a stranger to whom we are to deliver a secret message. We don't really know who that person is."

Bob looked at Jupiter in astonishment, but he soon realized that his friend had chosen the right tactic—adults never believe such things.

“Oh, yeah, so you’re a couple of smart guys!” the cop grinned under his cap. “Secret message and all. You can explain that to your social worker... Or the judge.” He giggled and put his hand on the holster of his gun.

The second cop stuck his head out the side window. “Should I call the others?” he shouted.

“Sure! Guess we finally caught the tyre slasher gang. Or the burglars the helicopter patrol are looking for.” The hand twitched at the holster of the gun.

Bob only noticed it at the very last moment—the black Mercedes passed them for the second time. The woman with the sunglasses looked stubbornly straight ahead. Bob followed the car out of the corner of his eye until it crossed the next street. The street light was bright enough for Bob to take note of the licence plate number.

“Well, that’s it,” Bob thought. “She’s not coming back.”

“We really are detectives,” he just heard Jupiter say. “Please call Chief Reynolds or Inspector Cotta. They are friends of ours and can confirm our identity and information.”

“And your fellow officers certainly won’t like to come out here for nothing,” Pete added as kindly as possible.

The cop obviously didn’t believe a word they said. “Okay give me your names,” he asked them and jotted on his notebook. Then he called out to his partner: “Okay. Andy, call Cotta and check on these three.” He walked back to the police car and passed their names to his partner.

As the first policeman walked back towards the boys, a wide smirk was written all over his face. The second policeman tapped on his police car phone. Bob heard the policeman giving their names and describing their appearances. It was a short call.

“You have to let them go,” he shouted with audible disappointment. “They may be crazy, but they’re harmless.”

“You boys are damn lucky,” the officer whispered. “Now get out of here! Little boys belong in bed at this hour!”

Bob wanted to respond, but Jupe held him back. “Leave it,” he muttered, “the wiser man gives way.”

Without giving them another look, the cops got in their car and drove off. The detectives stared at the police car with blank looks before getting back into Pete’s car.

“Damn, they messed everything up,” Jupiter said. “Well, at least they’re gone. Let’s open the envelope now!”

Bob pulled the envelope from his pocket. “Really?”

### 3. The Unknown Sender

Jupiter nodded. “Sure. Let’s open the envelope. The delivery failed anyway.”

“Did you see that black Mercedes drive by again?” Bob asked.

“Of course, something like that doesn’t escape me,” Jupiter replied. “And I took note of the licence plate. But we can check on that later. Let’s start with the envelope.”

Pete pushed the central lock button to lock all the doors. “For safety’s sake,” he commented. “I don’t like surprises from the outside.”

Bob pulled out his pocket knife and carefully slit the envelope. A piece of paper fell out. Jupe caught it, unfolded it and began to read:

*Johnny,*

*I know you don’t like me, but now you’re rid of me.*

*And you don’t like my stuff either. Still, you’re as keen on it as anyone. The lure of money, and one of you will get it. It’s the grand finale—and I’m giving it away!*

*The one who finds it first and takes it to the notary, Mr Pallister, will get the rewards associated with it. Whoever it will be, has my blessing. Will it be you? Well, it would almost be a miracle... Surely you’ll be ripped off again by the sneaky Ruler of the Black Tower! She is evil. So watch your back!*

*Here’s the first clue:*

*“You know the prince has to hide—because Charlie the Butcher is after him. You know, he had promised the prince a lot but lured him into a trap.*

*“Fortunately the prince finds an old hut—in the protected kingdom. He saved a treasure and he hides it in the chimney. But his heart longs for Helen. Unfortunately, Charlie is also nearby. The Butcher only has to cross the pass, from where he can see the Black Loch and the hut, and then...”*

*Well, now make an effort, old Johnny! Time is running out! But beware of our sneaky friend!*

*Greetings,*

*Glen*

Pete slapped his thighs laughing. “What is this stuff? ‘Prince’, ‘kingdom’, ‘Ruler of the Black Tower’...”

“I’m telling you, someone’s trying to set us up.” Bob triumphed. “And this line, ‘*his heart longs for Helen*’—the last cuddle!”

Jupiter raised his hands defensively. “Not so fast, fellas. I find the letter extremely interesting. Bear in mind that we were not intended to be the recipients of the letter. We don’t know the connection. We must first discover it through logic.”

“But not here, Jupe! I’m hungry. Aren’t you too, Pete?”

“Good suggestion. I should be able to eat a few bags of fries by now,” Pete quipped.

“Let’s go get a burger!” Bob cried.

“Okay,” Jupe gave in. “I need a Coke, too. Drive off.”

Pete enjoyed gobbling French fries one piece after the other. “Well, Jupe, have you any idea who this Charlie the Butcher is?”

“Or whose heart longs for Helen?” Bob added.

Jupiter fingered the pieces of ice from his Coke. “Don’t always start with the most remote points.” He took out the letter. “Well, the addressee is this Johnny. It was written by a guy named Glen. I’ve no idea who they are.”

“So this is a mystery,” Bob said. “But as for the Black Loch, didn’t the letter say something about a loch?”

“Right, Bob.” Jupiter pulled out the letter. “Well, clearly ‘loch’ is Scottish for ‘lake’ as in Loch Ness.”

“Sure.” Bob nodded. “Therefore this is Black Lake. But does that help us? What do you think, Jupe?”

“Sure,” Jupiter said. “By the way, there is another indication that we are not on the trail of a joke, but of a real situation.”

“What’s that?”

“The notary, Mr Pallister. He’s real. He lives here in Rocky Beach.”

“Oh? But the woman in the Mercedes, Jupe?” Bob asked. “She couldn’t have been our Johnny?”

“I’d agree with you there, Bob,” Jupe said.

“And when she saw the police, she ran away,” Bob remarked.

“This could be an indication that Johnny is in real danger,” Jupiter suspected. “She got him out of the way to get the letter herself. Maybe she’s that conniving Ruler of the Black Tower the letter talks about.”

“Man!” Pete was very busy with his fries the whole time, but his brain was running at full speed. “That’s what it says in the letter,” he murmured, chewing. “She probably ripped Johnny off.”

“After all, there are several people involved,” Bob added. “A sort of race. Whoever is quickest gets something. Only what is it?”

“All it says here is *‘the grand finale’*.” Jupiter drank the last sip of his Coke. “Whatever this is, they’re all after it. It has something to do with money. Let’s take it like this.”

“Anyway, Johnny is to solve a mystery... in a kingdom,” Bob picked up the thread again. “But if this really is in Scotland, we are out of it. I’m afraid that’s a little too far to go to.”

Pete nodded. “You’re beginning to regret we didn’t fly over to the UK with the class, huh, Bob?”

“I don’t think we have to go to Scotland,” Jupe said coolly. “That would be highly unlikely.”

“So what is it about then?” Bob asked.

“Well, Bob,” Jupiter said. “Ideas are needed.”

“I can’t think now.” Pete got up. “I’m gonna get another bag of fries. Do you want anything else?”

Bob shook his head.

“It’s strange about the *‘protected kingdom’*,” Jupiter said after Pete went off. “Why is the kingdom protected?”

“Famous people are protected. Some flowers are protected, animals in Africa, the whales, at least from time to time...”

“You said it, Bob!” Jupiter suddenly leaned forward. “Protected nature! Well, where do you find them? In the national parks, of course. Ring any bells?”

“Ahh yes... Kings Canyon National Park,” Bob murmured thoughtfully and grinned. “This is a Californian national park—it’s in the mountains, north of here. It’s a protected kingdom, so to speak.”

“Well, let’s go to Headquarters. We need a map. We need to know if there’s a Black Lake in Kings Canyon National Park. Where can Pete be?”

“Here!” Pete pushed his way sideways through a group of guests. In his hand he held two bags of French fries. “Don’t worry. They’re both for me. What are you so excited about? Are you going to Scotland?”

Jupiter shook his head. “Why go far away when it is expensive? We are thrifty! We believe that Black Lake is in Kings Canyon National Park.”

“Good idea,” said Pete. “It might be true. At least there are no haunted castles.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure,” Bob said and paused briefly. “Should we go to the police and show them the letter?” It was more of a formal question.

“You have heard how the police react to stories of secret messages,” Jupiter replied as expected. “Even Inspector Cotta will laugh at us.”

“Okay,” Bob grinned. “I wanted to hear that. Let’s go on an adventure. Let’s work for Johnny and help him find the treasure.”

Quietly, the three detectives crept into The Jones Salvage Yard, operated by Jupiter’s uncle Titus and aunt Mathilda. In the meantime it was quite late and not even the television in Uncle Titus’s living room was on. Jupiter unlocked the door to the old mobile home trailer which served The Three Investigators as their headquarters.

The three of them went inside. Jupiter turned on the computer and inserted a CD-ROM about national parks. He soon found what he was looking for—Kings Canyon National Park.

“My father was there once,” Pete said. “He said it was great.” All three stared spellbound at the screen on which a map had just appeared.

“Black Lake! Look, it’s really there!” Bob pointed to a small remote lake in the highlands.

“I can’t believe it!” Jupiter shook his head in disbelief. “Looks like we’re on the right track. There’s a camp site registered a few miles away. Well... you guys want to go for a ride?”

At that moment the phone rang. They looked at each other. It was pretty late for a call. Jupiter switched on the loudspeaker so that the other two could listen in, and then picked up the receiver. “The Three Investigators. Jupiter Jones speaking.”

It was Inspector Cotta. “So I manage to get to you after all! What was that situation you were in just now?”

“Oh, we’re just on the trail of a little secret.” Jupiter said. “But we had nothing to do with any break-ins. Honest, Inspector.”

“I know that, Jupiter.”

“Thank you, Inspector. Oh, while you’re at it, what kind of burglars were the police looking for?”

“I thought you might ask me about this, Jupiter,” Cotta replied. “I checked with my colleagues. There was an anonymous tip-off.”

“Oh?” Jupiter was surprised.

“But they found no one but you three. Thought-provoking, isn’t it?”



“Oh, yes,” Jupiter remembered something. “There is something else.”

“What is it?” Cotta asked.

“I have a licence plate number here, and I need some information on it.”

But Cotta sighed. “You know very well that it’s against the privacy regulations if I identify a car number for private purposes.”

“Yes, indeed,” replied the First Investigator.

“Give me the number and I see what I can do for you?” Cotta said.

Jupiter gave him the number and through the loudspeaker, they could hear Cotta typing something into the computer.

“I can only tell you that it is a rental car,” Cotta came back. “That is all I can do for you.”

“Ah, I remember there is one more thing, Inspector. Do you know a notary by the name of Mr Pallister?”

Cotta laughed. “I didn’t think you’d ask me that. I met him several times in the course of my work. I think he specializes in film and book rights. He is considered very reliable and has a good reputation.”

“Thank you, Inspector. Greetings from Pete and Bob. And good night!”

“Good night!” Cotta hung up.

Jupiter turned around. “Interesting. The police had a tip. That’s why they were patrolling that area. Maybe it was just a coincidence. In any case, it prevented the letter from being delivered.”

“Or maybe it was no coincidence,” Bob added.

“Too bad our search on the licence plate of that black Mercedes didn’t work out,” Pete remarked.

“A rental car,” Juve said. “I should have guessed.”

Pete waved his hand. “Either way, we should think about how to persuade our parents to let us go to Kings Canyon National Park,” he said. “Black Lake is waiting for us... and this lonely mountain hut.”

“With a chimney,” Bob added.

“In which the solution to the puzzle lies,” said Pete and crumpled up his last French fries bag.

The friends said goodbye and Bob and Pete left Headquarters.

Jupiter cleared out some mess and rubbish from the trailer. He was very much out of his element. On the one hand, the secret sender, the strange letters and the mysterious woman in the black Mercedes really offered enough material to arouse his curiosity to the maximum. On the other hand, he couldn’t shake the feeling that they were getting involved in a story they couldn’t get a hang on.

A short while later, he locked the trailer and proceeded to walk across the salvage yard towards his house.

Just then, he heard Pete shouting out loud.

## 4. Into the Wilderness

Immediately Jupiter ran towards the gate of the salvage yard and got out to the street. There he saw an angry Pete.

"They slashed the front tyres of my car!" he shouted in rage. "It's probably those damn tyre slashers that keep messing around. Damn, of all days to strike today when we're supposed to go to Kings Canyon tomorrow!"

Bob, who was standing next to Pete, pointed to the two flat tyres without comment, the three of them looked at the damage. The knife wounds were clearly visible.

Jupiter pinched his lower lip. "A bit too many coincidences at once," he said.

"What do you mean?" Bob looked up at Jupiter.

"Maybe someone has something against us going to the National Park," Jupiter said thoughtfully. "I think somebody wants to stop us."

For a moment, there was silence. They looked at each other.

"Is that going to scare us off?" Pete finally asked.

Bob chuckled and said ironically: "Sure! Far too dangerous! Tomorrow we borrow the knitting equipment from Aunt Mathilda and make a nice sofa cushion."

"And in the basement there are still many unresolved crossword puzzles in storage," added Jupiter. "These will last us a few days. Besides, I always wanted to go through the old stamp collection together with Uncle Titus. Very exciting, the whole thing."

"Okay, okay, I get it," grinned Pete. "So we're gonna stay on the ball. I wouldn't have expected otherwise. We'll take your Beetle, Bob. My MG can stay here for a while. With the tyres like this, no one's gonna steal it."

Jupiter nodded. "I don't think anybody would do that even if your tyres are fixed, Pete. Such a clunker..."

Pete twitched his nose. "At least I have a car... You don't!"

Quietly the engine of the Beetle hummed along. Pete was at the wheel and Jupiter sat in the passenger seat as usual.

"Without your father's support, we probably wouldn't have got away so easily, Pete. He would have loved to come along," said Bob, who was hardly visible at the back seat between the rucksacks, sleeping bags and the rolled up tent that were quickly thrown together.

"My father spent a weekend in Kings Canyon a few years ago," Pete reported. "Since then, he always wanted to go again. But as it is, it never worked out. Now he is very happy that we want to use the free days to educate ourselves a bit, uh... about nature."

"It's great that adults support educational travel like this," Bob grinned.

"It was a great idea of him to lend us his mobile phone," Pete said. "Right, Bob?"

Bob nodded. "So we can always get help. This way even my parents agreed to the trip. Ow!" He held his knee. "Pete, why did your father squeezed that weird box in the back seat at the last minute? I keep knocking into it."

"That is a bear box."

"A what?" Bob exclaimed. "We're supposed to feed bears there?"

Pete laughed. "No. But there are bears. You must keep your food odourless so as not to attract them."

Bob swallowed. "Pete, are you sure there are bears running around free? I think I'm going to have to rethink all of this."

He remained silent for a while, while his gaze continued to linger on the bear box. "Pete, please turn back on the next exit," he finally said. "I'm not scared of gangsters, but bears..."

"Stay cool, Bob. There aren't that many. And with a loud shout you can usually drive them away—unlike some gangsters."

"What if I'm hoarse?"

"Now, don't be silly, Bob. Enjoy the ride. How about you read us the information about the National Park that my father gave me? It also says something about the bears."

Reluctantly Bob leafed through the documents. "Hmm... Pete, are bears actually afraid of mobile phones? Or are they lured by it?"

Now Jupiter was getting too excited. "Bob, hand me the documents, please, so that I can get reasonably structured information."

Pete nodded and grinned. "Give them to Juve, Bob. Then he can give us a lecture."

"Whatever. I'm tired anyway." Bob pushed the documents to Juve and let himself fall back into the mountain of sleeping bags. "You could have told me earlier about the bears," he murmured.

Jupiter nodded at Pete. "You did everything right."

They took turns driving a few more times. Then the streets became increasingly empty and bumpy.

They almost drove past the obscured turn-off. Jupiter noticed them just in time. "Stop, Pete, this is the way in! The camp site must be located along this path. From there we can reach Black Lake in a day trip."

The car rumbled along the narrow road. They drove further and further into the highlands. To the left and right of the street there were no houses and no people to be seen.

"Pretty lonely here," Bob muttered, pushing himself even deeper into the sleeping bags. "There's not even a burger restaurant here."

"Then we really are at the end of the world," mumbled Pete. In the face of the barren land, even he lost his thirst for adventure.

It was already getting dark when the entrance gate to the camp site appeared in front of them. Jupiter let his eyes wander over the grounds. The place seemed to be completely empty. It was also unpleasantly cool here in the highlands. Shivering, he pulled his jacket tighter.

Pete stopped the car in a parking bay and the three detectives went over to the small camp site office, dimly-lit by an old desk lamp.

"Hello," cried Jupiter. "Anybody here?"

A soft grumbling could be heard and a grumpy looking man shuffled from a back room into the reception area. He was wearing an old dirty flannel shirt. "What's up?"

Jupiter took the floor. "We'd like to register for camping. Three of us, one car, one tent. You are open, aren't you?"

"Why wouldn't we be open?"

"Because, uh, this place looks so empty," Jupiter said.

"There aren't many people who visit Kings Canyon from here," mumbled the man and stroked his confused hair. "What are you doing here of all places?"

“We looked for a place away from the tourist crowds,” Jupe said quickly.

The TV was on in the back room. Someone was zapping through the programmes. A woman’s voice shouted, “Walt, who is it?”

“Guests,” Walt narrowly called back. He pulled out a form from under the table. “Fill this out. The price is stated on it, and you have to pay now.”

Jupiter pulled out some bills and put them on the table. The man put it in his pocket.

“Put the tent in one of the designated places. Hope you brought food. You can only buy the bare essentials from me—between 7:30 and 8:00 in the morning.”

“Uh, do you have any bread?” Pete asked.

“Tomorrow morning between 7:30 and 8:00. Have you finally fill out that form? I don’t want to be stuck here!”

“It’s pretty expensive here for the lousy service,” said Bob when they unloaded the backpacks from the Beetle. The mood of The Three Investigators was at rock bottom. It was too dark here, too cold and too lonely. It was an inhospitable place.

“Your Beetle is really growing on me,” said Pete. “It’s the only link to civilization.”

Bob smiled. “Don’t forget the mobile phone.”

Without a word, they began to pitch their tent. Luckily Pete was well-versed with it and so it was quickly set up. Just as he hammered in the last hook, he looked up.

“Look over there. Someone else is coming!” He pointed to the entrance. They saw the lights of a Chevrolet flashing, and shortly afterwards, it stopped at some distance from them. A person got out and unloaded bags on the lawn.

“Shall we help him?” Bob wanted to know.

“I for one am too tired,” Pete replied. “I just want to go into my sleeping bag.”

“I’m joining Pete,” Jupiter said.

“Okay, I’m persuaded as well.” Bob followed the other two into the tent and pulled the zip behind him.

They stowed their backpacks and rolled out the sleeping bags.

Bob pulled out a can of peaches. “Our dinner,” he announced. “I guess we’re all too tired to cook now.”

“Better than nothing,” said Jupiter. Pete’s face, on the other hand, showed that he was dreaming of something else—probably French fries.

“Damn,” Bob cried, “we forgot the can opener. I wonder if the camp site office is still open.”

“I think I can do without the peaches,” Pete said and slipped into his sleeping bag.

“Not me. I’ll take a look.” Bob got out of the tent. Just outside, he stopped for a moment. It was quiet out here. But as his ears got used to the silence, Bob heard the howling of a dog from somewhere in the surrounding. Branches cracked. Something rushed nearby. The animals of the night were awake.

The camp site office was dark, but the other camper had pitched his tent in the meantime. He was in his car now, with the interior light on.

Bob decided to go over. When he passed the man’s tent, he noticed that it looked brand new but was very sloppily set up.

Bob knocked on the car door. The man looked up in surprise and put aside the book he was reading. It looked like one of those cheesy serial novels, Bob thought. Slowly the man lowered the side window. A whiff of alcohol blew at Bob. The detective already regretted having come here.

“Good evening. Sorry to bother you, mister.”

“Evening.”

“I have a request. We forgot our can opener. Can we borrow yours, please?”

“Sorry, I don’t have one.”

“Okay, good night then,” Bob said.

The man let the window buzz up again and turned back to his reading.

Bob turned around and went back to the tent. He’s had enough for today. He pulled up the zip of the tent opening and climbed in. Pete was already asleep and Jupiter had pulled out the two letters again. He looked up.

“No can opener?”

Bob shook his head. “This really is the end of the world here. And you, do you have any new insights?”

“No. But I can’t concentrate either. There are such strange noises outside.”

“It comes from the forest,” Bob said. “Some kind of animal.”

Jupiter switched off the flashlight. “Well, good night. Tomorrow’s another day. We’ll solve the mystery.”

Jupiter was already about to doze off when he was suddenly rudely awakened.

“Hey, Jupe!” Bob’s voice trembled and he pulled excitedly at Jupiter’s sleeping bag.

“Something hummed just now. Very close. Jupe, I think that must be a bear!”

Jupiter laughed softly. “Go to sleep. It was just my stomach.”

## 5. Off Limits

The morning sun warmed the tent. Pete yawned and enjoyed the warmth for a few seconds before unzipping his sleeping bag. The other two were still asleep.

He slipped out and gathered his clothes. Then he opened the tent and got out. In daylight, the situation here was very different. It was a beautiful scene—hills, mountains, a stream, small forests. Everything was illuminated by the morning sun. The loneliness of the place, which had seemed so oppressive yesterday on arrival, now radiated something soothing, even seductive. It was an invitation to explore an untouched landscape.

The other camper was nowhere to be seen. His tent shone in the sun. It was not exactly well constructed, Pete could see that from a distance. The man must have been pretty tired last night, he thought. Curious, Pete went over and looked at the tent and then at the car.

He was about to take a look through the side windows when a sharp voice made him startle. “Get out of here!”

Pete turned around. The man was suddenly behind him. His straw-blond hair shone in the sun. He had a shopping bag in his hand and stared at him.

“Sorry,” stammered Pete, “I really didn’t mean to...”

“I’ve been stolen a lot! Especially on camp sites.” The man forced himself to smile. “Sorry if I was a little harsh.” But the smile had already disappeared from his face.

Pete remained calm. “Of course, Mister. I was just going to the camp warden to get some groceries. See you.” He turned away and walked on. Although the man had become a little more friendly in the end, Pete did not like him. There was something unpleasant in his gaze.

When Pete came back to the tent a little later with full paper bags, Jupiter and Bob were also on their feet. The tea water was already boiling on the stove.

“We figured you’d be looking for something to eat,” Jupiter called out to him and poured the water over the tea.

“It’s not very much there, but I bought almost the whole shop,” grinned Pete.

They sat down in the sun in front of the tent and made themselves breakfast. With every bite and with every sip, their spirit of enterprise increased again.

“I suggest dismantling up the tent and taking it with us,” said Jupiter. “You never know how the weather will turn out. Besides, the trip to Black Lake and back in one day is pretty exhausting.”

Pete agreed. “It’s also quite late. And wild camping is even allowed in Kings Canyon—as long as you follow the rules.”

“But the bears!” Bob crossed his arms. “We deviate from our original and safe plan.”

Pete laughed. “The bears can hardly be worse than the camp warden and that strange visitor,” he said.

“I can’t stand those guys either,” Bob replied. “But out into the wilderness? Who knows what’s waiting for us there.”

“Come on, Bob,” Pete said. “Bears are actually afraid of people. They usually stay out of the way. Come on, let’s pack up. Besides, we have my dad’s phone with us.”

“It’s not much use as a weapon against bears,” Bob grumbled and then rose to pack his things.

They left the Beetle on the camp site and set off. Jupiter read the map and led the group. In the beginning they enjoyed the lonely but charming landscape. But it was an exhausting hike with the heavy backpacks on their backs. The paths were stony and sometimes slightly uphill. They also had to cope with the altitude. Since the air was very thin here in the mountains, Jupiter, in particular, soon ran out of breath.

The First Investigator started to sweat more and more, his breath went faster and faster. Pete heard that. "Let's walk calmly and steadily," he suggested. "There's no point in rushing."

So they slowed down the pace and Pete turned to Bob. "Hey, what's wrong with you?" he asked. "You're not saying anything!"

"I'm focussing on the path," Bob mumbled. "And also I'm thinking about this blond camper. I thought he was kind of flashy. I wonder if he is following us."

"I didn't notice anything on the way here," Pete replied. "What about you?"

Bob shook his head, but then he suddenly stopped and turned around. "Didn't I just see a flashing light?"

Now Jupiter and Pete also stopped and searched the area with their eyes. But there was nothing unusual. "Guess we're alone here," Jupiter said and started walking again.

Silently they wandered on. In the meantime, the sun was burning down strongly from the sky and it was quite hot despite the altitude reached. They crossed a stream where they refreshed themselves a little. Then they followed the path along the stream through a bare valley. Ridges overgrown with shrubbery rose on both sides of the valley.

Suddenly Jupiter stopped and pointed forward. "What's that sign? It's weird being in the middle of a field."

Pete, who was in front, set the pace and was the first to reach it. "'Private Property. Do not Enter'," he read aloud.

Jupiter came up and took out the map. "Oh! That's why this line is here!" He pointed to the map. "Black Lake and its surroundings are not part of the National Park at all." Jupiter bent further over the plan. "Well, well, well. Private land in the middle of a conservation area."

"There is such a thing," said Pete. "If someone doesn't want to sell his land to the National Park, it remains private for now."

"Let's hope the 'Do not Enter' sign also applies to bears," Bob remarked.

Pete grinned and studied the map. "Well, there are some beautiful woods. And that's where bears are known to go to..."

"Let's go then," Jupiter urged them to move on. "Bears are probably as inexperienced as we are in reading signs of prohibition..."

Around noon, they finally reached the pass described in Glen's letter, which led up the right ridge. Behind this mountain should be Black Lake. They should be close to their destination so they took a short breather and then began their ascent.

The path led steeply uphill, but despite the exertion, even Jupiter did not slow down. Pete was nevertheless soon far ahead of him and Bob. Suddenly he disappeared behind a ledge. Then Jupiter and Bob heard him call.

"There it is! Black Lake! It's beautiful, gorgeous and scary. That's how I imagine Scotland to be!"

Bob and Jupe reached the top. The sight was indeed impressive. Below them a narrow, dark and very long lake stretched across the landscape. On the opposite side was another elongated mountain range. The right end of the lake could be seen, the left one was covered by a mountain slope.

“All that’s missing now is the Loch Ness Monster,” joked Pete. “Look out, Bob, behind you! It’s going to eat you!”

Bob gave a tortured smile and quickly changed the subject. “The letter says: ‘*Charlie the Butcher only has to cross the pass, from where he can see the Black Loch and the hut...*’ From here, I can see the lake but not the hut.”

“Let’s go on,” Jupiter suggested. “Maybe it’s covered by a hill from here.”

After only a few steps, they saw that Jupiter was right. About a kilometre down the slope an old log cabin became visible between the bushes.

“So we are really on the right track!” cried Bob excitedly. “That’s definitely it!”

The path was divided into a direct descent to the cabin and a winding path. Although nowhere a human being was to be seen, Jupiter suggested taking the somewhat longer and winding road. “It is largely hidden by bushes and trees. That way we can’t be seen so easily. After all, we’re not really supposed to be here.”

Pete and Bob agreed and they set off downhill. With the destination in sight, they made good progress.

Soon they were near the cabin. They found a hidden place where they could put the heavy backpacks. Exhausted, they let themselves plop into the grass and fortified themselves with some fruits.

Jupiter pulled the letter out of his pocket and read it again: “‘*He saved a treasure and he hides it in the chimney...*’ Well, we’re about to find out what it is. Come on, let’s go. We can leave the backpacks here. There isn’t a soul around.”

“If it isn’t a mistake,” muttered Bob. The whole time he hadn’t got rid of the feeling that the surroundings had eyes. But he didn’t want to nag on, and basically, he was glad to get rid of his heavy backpack for a while.

Carefully they approached the log cabin. A few metres away they stopped and inspected it. It had a window on each of the two sides facing them. “It was probably used as a hunting lodge in the past,” Jupiter whispered.

“Bear hunting,” Pete added, grinning at Bob, who elbowed him back.

“Quiet, you two!” Jupiter intervened. “You’re gonna ruin everything.”

They snuck up to the house and crouched under one of the windows.

“I’ll have a look,” whispered Pete. “Somebody has to do it.”

Jupiter looked at him astonished, otherwise he always had to ask Pete to do such tasks first. But what Pete did was to pull out his little pocket mirror and held it so that he could look through the window.

“I don’t see anyone,” Pete said and stood up. “Wow... the cabin’s really well furnished.”

Jupiter also rose. “Yeah, it looks really good. Maybe it’s only rented out temporarily. All pretty tidy. I guess nobody lives in it right now.”

“Well, then we can take our time and look around.” Bob stretched his legs. Following Pete’s initiative, he wanted to join in to look around.

“I’ll check the door.” He went around the corner and found the entrance. Carefully he pushed the door handle down.

“Oh!” Against all odds, the door gave way and swung open. “Hey you two! It’s not locked,” he said with a smile. “All very hospitable here. We don’t even need your lock picks.”

“Careful,” hissed Jupiter, who had followed Bob, and held him by the arm. “I don’t like this. Maybe there’s someone in there. You don’t usually leave a cabin like this unlocked.”

“Probably in the wilderness, yes,” Bob remarked.



"I don't think so. The way the cabin is furnished," Jupiter said. "All right, let's go in. Be careful."

They entered the cabin quietly. They listened. Nothing could be heard except Bob's quick breath. There was a fireplace in the middle of the room.

"The chimney," Bob whispered.

Jupiter nodded. "I'll just have a look at the chimney," he announced and began to tap the inside of the chimney. But he didn't get a hold of anything. Jupiter pulled his hands out again. They were pitch black with soot.

"Nothing," he said, wiping his hands with a handkerchief.

"There's no one down here, but there's still upstairs," whispered Pete. Next to him was a wooden staircase that led to a trap door to the upper floor.

Suddenly Bob pulled Jupe's sleeve. "Is there a noise?"

"Where?" Jupiter asked.

"Upstairs? Outside? I don't know..." Bob replied.

"Probably a Northern California fighting bear," grinned Pete. Bob threw a scathing look at him.

"So let's go up," said Jupiter. "This time it's your turn again, Pete."

"Yeah, go, you fighting bear," Bob threw in. "Let's see what you got."

"All right, if that's what you gentlemen want. Though I don't see why Jupe always stays out of it!"

"To protect my brain," the First Investigator quipped.

Quietly Pete climbed the wooden stairs, foot by foot, step by step. At the top, he had to push the wooden trap door to get to the upper floor. He pressed gently against it. It opened immediately and swung back with a slight whirring sound.

"Well-oiled!" muttered Pete and carefully put his head through the opening.

It was just too late! He saw a black figure. It rushed down on him from the side and hit him on the head. Darkness fell around him. He slumped down and fell backwards down the stairs.

## 6. The King's Message

Jupiter saw Pete falling towards him. He spread his arms to catch him, but the impact was too strong. Jupiter tilted backwards and Pete landed on the considerable body mass of the First Investigator. Footsteps could be heard upstairs. Then there was the sound of a window opening.

"Bob, do something," puffed Jupiter and tried to gently free himself from Pete who was lying on him. "Somebody's up there, I think he's on the roof."

Staring in shock, Bob had followed the scene. The sound of an impact could be heard outside. Now Bob came to life. He rushed to the window and looked outside. "It's a woman," he shouted.

Then he ran outside to try to chase her, but she had disappeared. "Damn it, she's already gone."

Jupiter swore softly to himself. He had push Pete to the floor in the meantime. Pete groaned and with Jupiter's help he slowly straightened up.

"Ooah." He rubbed his head. "And I thought my headache was finally over."

Jupiter tapped him on the shoulder. "Now don't whine, Pete. If it weren't for me, you'd have a skull fracture."

Bob came back inside the cabin, "Jupe!" he intervened. "Please be a little gentler on our wounded friend."

"Thanks for the helpful tip, Bob!" Jupe said. "Why did you let that woman go?"

"She was too fast. I only saw her for a few moments. When I went out, she was already gone."

"Was it the one in the black Mercedes?" Jupiter asked.

"I don't know, Jupe. I only saw her from behind, and only for a short time. She jumped through the bushes like a... like a kangaroo."

"Kangaroos don't jump through California bushes... only in the mind of Bob Andrews," Jupiter remarked.

"Jupe, you know exactly what I mean!" Bob argued.

"It just annoys me that we might have been too late!" Jupiter cried. "The woman probably beat us to it and found the treasure!"

"Please, friends, grumble a little quieter!" Pete covered his ears. "My head can't take this pounding."

"Okay, okay," Jupiter said a little softer and stood up.

"Bob, you stay with Pete. I'll check upstairs." Jupiter climbed up the steps and disappeared through the hatch.

"After the intruder is gone, now he goes up," Bob muttered. Pete nodded and grinned again. They listened to what was going on upstairs.

"Really a bedroom," cried Jupiter down. "Two beds, unused." Then you could hear him knocking around for a while. "There's a fireplace up here as well that shares the same chimney. The chimney has a secret chamber, I'll try to open it."

Pete and Bob heard a rattling noise.

"Gee, Jupe! Is there anything in it?" cried Bob excitedly.

“Wait... yeah, no, but... wait, yeah, I got it now! ... Oahh!”

“Come on, tell me, don’t make it so exciting!” Bob exclaimed.

“Hold on, I’m coming down.”

“Hurry up, Jupe!” Bob said.

Slowly Jupe came stomping down the narrow stairs. In his hand he held an object wrapped in a cloth.

“Come on, Jupe, open it up.” Bob could hardly stand the tension.

Jupiter settled down on the floor next to Pete. “I’m glad that this was still there and I found it,” he said beaming. “We probably interrupted the woman’s search and she had to flee before she could find this.”

Carefully he unrolled the cloth. Out came a statue of about twenty centimetres high. Jupiter turned it in his hands. It was made of metal and represented a stocky male figure. The base is a triangle. The head was adorned with a crown.

“A king,” Jupiter stated.

“Give me that,” Pete said. A little reluctantly Jupiter handed him the statue.

“Look,” said the Second Investigator, “there’s a little mirror embedded in the king’s belly.” Pete turned the king so that a ray of sunlight shining through the window reflected on Bob. “Hello, Bob, a flash photo—smile, please,” he joked and pressed the crown of the king.

A part of the statue popped up and Pete dropped it in shock. The king landed in his lap. At the same time, some small, narrowly pieces of paper slipped out from the inside of the statue. “Boy, did I scare you.”

“This is getting more and more exciting.” Jupiter took the pieces of paper and sorted them. “Aha,” he murmured. His gaze flew across the papers. “There it is, the next message!”

Bob looked at Jupiter questioningly. “Why the next message? Isn’t that the solution yet?”

“There is a letter and a manuscript,” said Jupiter, sorting the paper. “Listen to what our Glen writes:

*Bravo, Johnny!*

*Congratulations! You get the reward now: Part One of the last episode of the manuscript. Part Two follows later. Where and how you find the rest of the ending, you will find out when you read this part carefully. Well, and then here’s the statue. It’s an old Scottish chess piece, by the way. Guard it well. You’re going to need it!*

*Remember, you are now in the realm of the Ruler of the Black Tower...*

*Greetings,  
Glen*

“So this is it!” Bob slipped restlessly back and forth on the floor. “It’s about the last episode of a manuscript—the final part of a story written by this Glen.”

“Must be quite a valuable manuscript,” said Pete, “if even Mr Pallister is involved. But why is it so valuable?”

“Let’s just read it,” Bob suggested. “Begin, Jupe.”

Jupiter cleared his throat. “Well...”

*The pale moonlight shone through the dilapidated roof of the hut. It illuminated Prince Edward’s fine features. Lonely and abandoned, he now sat at the fireplace where he had*

*hidden his treasure. Far away from everyone who loved him, Edward let his thoughts wander.*

*That night, Charlie gathered the army together for the last decisive battle against him, the true king of Scotland. And Helen, his beloved Helen, seemed to have let him down. Or had she even betrayed him to Charlie? Was she just a sweet bait with which his pursuer wanted to lure him to his doom? Before his eyes appeared the last kiss, so hotly exchanged...*

“Oh, the hotly-exchanged kiss,” Bob interrupted.

“It seems somehow familiar to me,” said Pete and rubbed his head.

“What? The hotly-exchanged kiss?” Bob asked curiously.

“No,” Pete replied. “The story of this prince—if only I didn’t have such a headache.”

“I know that too,” said Jupiter. “The ‘King of Scots’—that was my cue. A friend of Aunt Mathilda’s told me the other day when she came to visit us.” He smiled. “It’s a soap opera with the beautiful title, *Valley of Tears*.”

“A TV series?” Bob asked.

“Yes!” Jupiter exclaimed.

Pete sat up. “Sure! Now I remember. I zapped myself in there the other day watching TV with Kelly. A Scottish prince who was fleeing from the English king in the 18th century. We did not watch for long. Too bad for us.”

“But the series is a big hit,” Jupiter said. “Love and Fantasy. It first came up as a TV movie, then because of its success, a TV series was made. Aunt Mathilda’s friend talked about it for hours. A true fan, and there are plenty of them.”

“Some people have time,” muttered Bob.

Jupiter continued: “There are millions of people who are watching this. And we may hold in our hands part of the end of the story that half of America is so anxiously waiting for.”

Pete nodded. “So that’s why this race is taking place. Johnny is looking for the ending and probably this sneaky Ruler of the Black Tower is also on the lookout. Whoever brings the whole manuscript to Mr Pallister first will get the rewards. That means he has the rights for all media and earns big time.”

“Exactly,” said Jupiter. “So it must have been decreed by the author. So this Glen who wrote this manuscript has to be Glen MacHeart. That’s the name of the author of this series, if I remember correctly.”

“And you usually do.” Bob started laughing. “Glen MacHeart—that’s really a class name for a story like this. And you’re right. Now that you mention it, I remember. Many people read this stuff. Even the strange camper had such a book in his hand when I went to him last night.”

“See!” Jupiter grinned contentedly. “The name Glen MacHeart is, of course, a pseudonym. It’s a good match for the series. He probably has a very simple name in reality, something like John Smith.”

“Or Pete Jones,” joked Bob. “Go ahead and read, Jupiter.”

“Hey, what about our backpacks?” Pete suddenly asked. “That woman might still be out there!”

## 7. The Battle of Culloden

“Damn, I forgot about our backpacks!” Jupiter rolled up the slips of paper and put the statue into his jacket. “Come on, I hope that woman hasn’t ruined our plans after all.”

They left the log cabin. As fast as they could, they ran to the place where they had left their things. But everything was untouched.

“Lucky.” Jupe inspected the backpacks. “Would have been too stupid to have made another mistake.”

Bob nodded. “I hope she’s not watching us.” He looked around. “Anyway, I’m dog-tired. Fellas, let’s look for a place to camp for the night.”

Pete and Jupiter agreed and they inspected the surroundings. After a while, they had found a suitable area. Hidden between some trees, the place was slightly elevated. One could even overlook a part of the lake from there.

While Jupiter and Bob pitched up the tent and took care of the backpacks, Pete stretched a thin, firm string in zigzag lines around the tent. “So, the trip wires for tonight are set up,” he said with satisfaction as he tied the end of the line to the last hook.

“So another powerful woman doesn’t hit you on the head again?” cried Bob from inside.

“I was thinking more along the lines of bears, Bob,” Pete replied calmly, looking at his work. “I have just seen the claw marks of a black bear on a tree. Guess we’re camped in the middle of his territory.” He grinned into himself and hung a small bell on the string. Then he pulled out the bear box with the food supplies from one of the backpacks. In silence, they set about their simple dinner.

“Why don’t you call your father, Bob,” Jupiter broke the silence after a while. “We should get in touch. And besides, he might know something about Glen MacHeart—like what his real name is. Journalists always know a story or two.”

Bob chewed to the end, swallowed the bite hastily and then reached for the mobile phone. But his father could not be reached.

After that, Jupiter tried to call Uncle Titus. But even he had no luck. At least he could leave a message on the answering machine saying that they were fine.

Pete on the other hand reached his mother. She turned out to be an avid fan of *Valley of Tears*, but still could not provide any further information. Pete put the phone on Jupiter’s sleeping bag. “Well, we might as well finish reading the manuscript,” he suggested.

“Okay,” Jupiter pulled out the slips of paper. “Where were we?”

“At kisses,” Bob said.

“So somehow they impressed you,” Pete teased. “Normally, it’s more of my business...”

“You think so?” Bob returned aggressively. “All you get from women these days are beatings!”

“Because you always shirk the dangerous tasks!” Pete snapped. “Next time, one of you lead the way!”

“Okay, Pete, it’s a deal.” Jupiter ended the discussion. “And now listen.” He turned on the flashlight and began to read aloud:

*Over the memory of the kisses, the prince finally fell asleep. He did not hear a horse approaching...*

*Charlie, the ally of the English king, was closing in on Prince Edward. But the prince barely managed to escape once again. He couldn't risk his life anymore, so he decided to flee to America without Helen.*

*But first, he had to get a document from the castle—a document that would prove the dark ploys of his adversaries.*

“Attention,” Pete interrupted his friend. “I’m sure this is the puzzle for the next part of the manuscript.”

Jupiter held his flashlight closer to the text. “Sure. It’s the last page, too. So listen carefully:

*Cautiously, the prince approached the castle. But how could he get in? The deceitful friend, the Ruler of the Black Tower, cannot recognize him under any circumstances.*

*Then chance came to his aid. He met an old herb witch who spoke to him.*

*“If you survive this last test,” she croaked, “then you will have a happy and long journey. Here, take my clothes, put on my bonnet, and the Ruler of the Black Tower cannot recognize you.”*

*The prince disguised himself as he was told and knocked on the gate of the Black Tower.*

Pete and Bob listened to the further course of the story with great interest.

*The prince, dressed as a herb witch, managed to get a place to sleep in the castle’s stable. He waited until midnight and then sneaked into the art gallery.*

*There it was—the painting he was looking for. For a moment, the pain drove through Edward’s heart. It was in 1746. On the left were the Scots, on the right, the English soldiers. The different clothing and equipment of the people and also their arrangement on the painting clearly showed where the superiority laid—on the English side. They had brutally won the fight. The pain overwhelmed Edward, but he got his feelings back under control. Even the distorted depiction of the Scots did not distract him from his intentions.*

Jupe took a short break and then read on slowly:

*The prince calmly projected an imaginary line from the bayonet of the front English soldier depicted in the painting. It gave him the decisive hint. But he had focused too much on the secret.*

*Suddenly he heard muffled footsteps behind him. They were very close. In horror, he wanted to turn around. But then a cold black hand went around his neck...*

“The story stops here,” Jupe concluded.

“Exciting,” Bob said. “We absolutely have to search for the described painting to find out the end of Glen MacHeart’s story. I’m really beginning to wonder if the prince will get away.”

Jupe smiled. "By the way, the painting described exists in reality," he said. His friends looked at him in astonishment. Another proof of his mastermind?

But Jupiter shook his head. "You should know that too! It was mentioned the other day in our history class. Well, once again, hardly anyone listened to her. It's an old painting of a famous battle," he paused for a moment, "Only that the painting is in Windsor Castle, far away in Europe."

"But I still think the solution is very close," Bob replied. "It must be so—'Black Loch' was 'Black Lake'. We found the statue. And the whole environment here looks very Scottish."

"You said it," Pete shouted in between. "I'm sure there's a copy of the painting around here somewhere!"

Bob nodded. "And maybe there is even a castle here at Black Lake, in Scottish style, of course, or a replica. The castle of that so-called Ruler of the Black Tower. She probably had the stones packed in boxes and brought them here from Europe. And then assembled again, piece by piece—true to the original."

Jupiter looked at the map. "Good thinking, fellas. There's nothing marked on the map, but it's pretty old. Besides, we are on private property here, not even the paths are correctly indicated. Tomorrow we should go to the end of the lake, since we can't see it from here!"

Bob enthusiastically agreed. "Sure, Jupe! The Ruler of the Black Tower must live there! She was also mentioned in Glen's second letter. It said '*you are now in the realm*', or something like that."

"Right." Jupiter pulled out the letter. "This area seems to belong to her. There must be a house here where she lives in."

"Is it the woman in the black Mercedes?" Pete asked.

Jupiter nodded. "Maybe. Maybe it's also the woman from this afternoon. It's a shame we haven't seen them properly both times."

"Then she must have got our Johnny out of the way," Bob concluded, "and is now looking for the manuscript herself because she's after the money."

"But there are supposed to be other seekers," Pete thought.

The two were unstoppable. But Jupiter curbed the euphoria of his friends. "One thing makes me nervous," he said. "Glen writes in his novel that the prince is in this log cabin and Charlie the Butcher is close on his heels. And we go into the cabin and Pete gets bashed by this woman. I'm curious to see what awaits us tomorrow at the Black Tower. It should not be a pleasant visit. Especially if she's really after the manuscript."

"Maybe a herb witch will help us," grinned Pete.

Jupiter put the pages of the manuscript in his notebook and packed them together with the statue under the end of his sleeping bag. "I wouldn't count on the help of a herb witch," he muttered. "We'll just have to figure something out for ourselves. I've had enough for today. Have a good night, fellas."

Bob leaned over. "Come on, give me that statue again."

Jupiter laughed. "You'll probably need a teddy bear instead..." But he gave him the king.

Bob took the statue, turned it in his hands, let the light of the flashlight refract in the small mirror and tried out the mechanism again. "Perhaps it will bring us luck," he murmured, laying the king beside him. Then he pulled the sleeping bag shut. "Pete, have you actually seen bear claw marks around here?"

"Nonsense," Jupiter answered for Pete. "Go to sleep, Bob."

## 8. The Bear is Loose

A loud yell woke up the First Investigator. It was already morning. He had slept through the whole night. Jupiter looked up.

It was Bob who had yelled, and he was already sitting vertically in his sleeping bag and pointed to Jupiter's foot end. Now Jupiter saw it too. The entrance of the tent had been ripped apart. A few fragments of the fabric fluttered in the wind!

"It must have been a bear!" cried Bob in horror. "Why didn't anyone hear the warning bell?"

"That was no bear." Jupiter inspected the damage. "These are straight cuts from a knife," he said slowly. "That was a human being."

"What about my trip wires?" Pete had also woken up and hurriedly slipped out of his sleeping bag and stood in front of the tent. "Strange," he said. "Everything is completely intact. It really couldn't have been a bear. But even a human being can't actually see these thin wires at night."

"Perhaps a Scottish ghost?" Bob tried to take it with humour.

But then Jupiter groaned. "Wait a minute!" he shouted. "The manuscript pages are gone! ... Oh no! Even the mobile phone! I put them both at the foot of my sleeping bag!"

Visibly trembling, Pete came back into the tent. "The phone is gone? Then we are in trouble," he said, startled. "Without the phone, we're cut off from the world."

"Fellas, I can't stand it here anymore," cried Bob. He crawled out of his sleeping bag and climbed outside. "It should be that woman again. I'm sure she's somewhere in the bushes watching everything we do—even now... Guys, we're leaving. I don't feel like it any more. We're leaving immediately, back to the camp site!"

"Are you crazy?" Pete had also come out. "Back? To that crazy camp warden? There are three of us. We just have to be careful. We're not giving up!"

"Of course we are not giving up," said Jupiter calmly and rolled himself outside. "Just think of it as a little warning at the right time. Sometimes we may be too impetuous."

While the friends continued to speculate about the incident, the tent was quickly packed up. Jupiter suspected that the woman from the log cabin had now taken what she had searched for.

Pete also saw it that way. "She must have been watching me while I was setting the trip wires," he said. "This was the only way she could approach the tent undetected during the night."

Bob nodded. "How fortunate that I had put the statue in my sleeping bag. Otherwise, it would be gone too." He proceeded to tie up his backpack.

In the meantime, Jupiter had sat down on a stone and wrote down the final part of the manuscript from memory. His perfect memory was of great help to him. Then they helped each other put on their backpacks and started walking.

Jupiter led the group over a hill overgrown with tall brushwood. Somewhere behind it had to be the end of the lake. All three were nervous. The area seemed to have a thousand eyes, but no matter how they looked around, they saw no one. Completely unexpectedly they suddenly reached an accessible forest path.



“Well, let’s see if it leads to a house.” Jupiter pulled out his map, but the way was not marked. Pete also looked at the map.

Bob hissed softly through his teeth, “Quiet, friends, something is moving behind.”

The three remained motionless and looked through the branches.

Something dark pushed its way between the leaves. It was less than fifty metres away from them.

“Oh yeah, it’s a bear this time,” Pete whispered. “A black bear, typical in this area. Stop, Bob, don’t move!” He held his friend, who wanted to turn around and run away. “You’re just making him aware of you. Besides, he would have caught up with you very fast.”

“Bears are actually afraid of people,” Jupiter interrupted softly. He didn’t like it when someone else knew so well. “But you must not provoke them,” he added.

The bear had turned his back on them. It paced back and forth. Something in front of it seemed to attract its attention. The detectives couldn’t quite make it out.

Suddenly they heard a cry for help.

“Hey, somebody’s there,” Bob took it away. “A person!”

“Someone’s in trouble,” hissed Pete. Before Jupiter and Bob knew it, he had thrown the backpack off and ran off.

“Pete! Where are you going?” Carefully, Jupiter and Bob followed him.

Pete could knock most of the branches out of the way with his hands, but a few still hit him in the face. But that didn’t matter to him now. There was no time to lose.

The Second Investigator approached the clearing where the bear was still prancing around. Then Pete saw the person the bear was facing and he hesitated for a moment. But he walked a little further, then stopped and bent down to pick up some stones and pieces of wood lying around.

A few moments later, he appeared directly behind the straw-blond man. The animal had straightened up menacingly. With his projectiles in his hand Pete jumped out of the woods into the clearing.

“Shout out loud,” he shouted to the man. Pete began to throw wood and stones at the bear, shouting loudly. The man saw it and did the same as Pete. The bear lowered himself onto his front legs. It toddled indecisively back and forth. Then it turned around in a flash and was gone.

“Pooh!” Trembling, the blond man turned to his rescuer and tried to smile. Pete caught a strong whiff of alcohol. “Thank you very much,” the man stammered. “That was close.”

“But please, don’t mention it.” After his successful mission, the Second Investigator felt excellent. “I know a bit about bears,” he said proudly.

“Me too,” the man answered and looked at Pete. “But he caught me at the wrong moment.”

Pete nodded. “You were a guest at the camp site!”

“Yeah. Right. My name is, uh, Brad, uh, Smith. Brad Smith, yes. I, uh... where are your friends?”

Pete hesitated with the answer. In the next moment, both of them flinched. A sharp voice cut through the silence: “And what are you doing here, Mr Smith?”

Pete and the blond man turned around immediately. Jupiter had stepped out into the clearing behind them. He succeeded in surprising them. Pete grinned to himself. The blond man had been caught at the wrong moment for the second time within a short time.

“I, uh, yes, I study rocks in the National Park,” the man stuttered. “I do this summer after summer, uh, this year it’s just this region.”

“Rocks, oh yes, that’s very interesting. Have you found a nice aramite yet? It’s typical in this region!” Jupiter nodded at Bob, who was standing next to him in the meantime. “Learned that in school the other day, didn’t we, Bob?”

Bob looked irritated. “Uh, sure thing, Juve,” he said.

For a moment, the man seemed rattled. “Ara... aramite? Yes, of course, I have seen many, yes, further back there by the lake, but not in this particular area.”

“Pity. I would have loved to have seen a nice one.” Jupiter shrugged his shoulders and pointed to an elongated object that lay wrapped in a plastic bag a little further away. “What’s that there?”

“It’s my exploration tools in there,” the man said. In the meantime he had regained his composure. The moment of surprise was over. Then he went on the counter-offensive.

“What are you doing here alone in the wilderness?” he asked in a slightly sharper tone.

But Jupiter kept the situation in hand. “We conduct observations for a working group in our school,” he explained in a firm voice. “The subject is the behaviour of the black bear in North America.”

Pete and Bob nodded sharply.

“That’s right,” Pete said. “You must have accidentally gotten a hold of a bear’s hiding place.”

The man shrugged his shoulders and began to pack his bags. “Yes, that’s how it is. And now, if you’ll excuse me.”

“Where are you going?” Jupiter wanted to know. “Shouldn’t we walk together a bit more?”

“No, thank you very much indeed,” Smith replied. “I can manage fine on my own. I have to go now.”

Pete was about to leave as well when Jupiter held him back. “Do you know anything about a Black Tower?” he asked the man.

“Black Tower?” The man thought briefly. “Yes, that must be the castle. Through the forest, by the lake over there.” He pointed towards the lake. “There’s a black castle that might be your Black Tower. But, sorry, I’m going the other way.”

He turned around and disappeared between the trees.

## 9. The Black Tower

The three detectives waited until Mr Smith had gone off.

“Great, Pete,” Bob said. “That was quite an effort, the way you saved that man.” Jupiter also patted him on the shoulder appreciatively.

Pete smiled proudly. “A strange fellow, this Smith,” he said. “I don’t believe him about his rock exploration.”

Jupiter agreed with him. “Me neither. Not at all. Something is wrong with him. Hey, have you seen any aramite rocks here?”

“Aramite?” Bob asked. “By the way, I don’t remember about that rock in school, or perhaps I wasn’t paying attention.”

Pete shrugged his shoulders. “I don’t know either.”

“You haven’t seen a single one of them?” exclaimed Jupiter. “Aramite is in fact a pesticide and not a rock, let alone a typical rock in this area.”

Pete and Bob stared at him with open mouths. Without them even noticing, Jupiter had set up one of his traps again and Mr Smith had also promptly fallen into it.

Jupiter continued: “So he lied. Maybe Smith, if that is his real name at all, is another seeker and also on the trail of the puzzle. I wonder if he suspects we’re looking for manuscript as well.”

“I don’t think so,” Bob said. “Although I had the impression he was trying to hide something.”

Pete nodded. “Have you noticed the alcohol-laden breath? He must be quite a drunk.”

“Indeed,” Bob said. “At the camp site, he smelled the same way. What do you think is inside that long, narrow bag?”

“Perhaps a rifle,” Jupiter surmised with a serious expression. “From the length, it could be. We must be careful in any case.”

Pete let his gaze wander into the surroundings. “Quite crowded, this lonely place here. First the woman shows up and now this fake rock explorer. And the Ruler of the Black Tower lives nearby!”

“Come to think of it,” pondered Jupiter, “if Smith is after the manuscript himself, why should he help us find the Black Tower? That’s contradictory!”

“I don’t know,” Pete said. “We’ll figure it out. Let’s go to the Black Tower right now.”

“Okay.” They went back to their backpacks and then took off. They now followed the bumpy path they had discovered earlier. It led in the right direction.

For quite a while, they wandered over a slope overgrown with small trees. After they had crossed a ridge, the far end of the dark lake finally came into their view. It was slightly misty. Excited, they increased the pace. Soon they could see better through the trees.

Then they suddenly saw it below them—the Black Tower. It was enthroned on a small island close to the shore. It was in fact pitch black. The tower was practically a castle, or in other words, the whole castle was built as a square tower.

“Looks like an oversized shaft tower,” muttered Jupiter, impressed. The castle was accessible via a narrow headland, but there is a heavy gate to overcome.

Bob had also been silent at first at the impressive sight. “So it is true,” he summed up. “A Scottish castle in the middle of Kings Canyon National Park—secured like a military facility.”

He took a closer look at the tower. Darkly it loomed out of the haze.

Suddenly a window opened and a woman looked out.

Involuntarily Bob took a step back. “The Ruler of the Black Tower,” he whispered. Although he was still warm from running, he was shivering now. The woman looked around for a short while and then closed the window. Jupiter and Pete also saw her.

“Too bad, the woman was too far away for us to recognize her properly,” muttered Jupiter.

Pete nodded.

“Okay. We’ll look for a place to camp here,” Jupiter suggested. “Then we should have a good view of everything.”

“Aye, aye, sir.” Pete and Bob agreed.

After a short search, they found a suitable place. When the tent finally stood, it was already getting dark. They sat down on a fallen tree trunk and made themselves a small dinner.

“Tonight we have to get in there to see the art gallery,” Jupiter suggested. “We can’t just walk up to the gate and ring the bell. If it’s the woman from the cabin or the one in the black Mercedes, she’ll recognize us.”

“And lock us in the castle’s dungeon,” Pete joked. “Anyway, have a good time.”

Bob almost choked. “Why us? You’re the break-in specialist.”

“No, fellas. This time, you go first. I already proved my courage in the cabin. And with the bear.” Relaxed Pete leaned back. “Right, Juve?”

“When you’re right, you’re right,” said Jupiter.

Outraged, Bob shoved Juve into the side. “You’re just gonna give in?”

“It might not be bad at all if someone stays outside and keep watch,” said Jupiter. “Well, Bob, would you rather be indoors with the Ruler of the Black Tower or out here alone with a black bear?”

“Well, if you put it that way...” Bob said. “Gee, Juve, it’s like a choice between history and maths. All right, fine. I choose the Black Tower.”

“There you go,” said Jupiter.

Satisfied, Pete stood up and looked down at the castle. No light came out of the windows. The island was dark.

“I don’t believe it,” Pete suddenly hissed. “You’re lucky again!”

“How so?” Bob asked.

“The woman got into a car and is about to leave her castle,” Pete said. “All the lights are out, so there doesn’t seem to be anyone else inside. You should be able to enter unhindered.”

Jupiter and Bob looked. A small off-road vehicle stood on the access road to the castle and the woman was just about to close the gate from the outside. Then she got in the car and drove off. The engine of the car howled as it took a climb. A few minutes later, the red tail lights had disappeared into the night.

It got quiet again. Jupiter felt the light wind. Slowly the fog moved over the lake. “So then! I’m sure the woman will be gone for a while.” He got rid of his hiking boots and pulled the lighter sports shoes out of his backpack. “These are more appropriate now!”

Bob did the same. They decided that one of the two flashlights should stay with Pete.

Jupiter grabbed the other flashlight. “Pete, maybe you can help us get through the gates.”

“No problem, Juve. But then I’ll withdraw discreetly.”

With Pete's lock pick collection, which he usually brought with him on their missions, the gate was not an insurmountable obstacle.

They found themselves in a kind of garage where there was another off-road vehicle. Jupiter shone a light on it. "She's well-equipped, the lady."

Bob nodded. "I'm very relieved that we're here alone. At least this way we can look around in peace. Even if the woman just went down to the camp site, she'll be gone for a while." He pointed at a door. "That should be the entrance."

Soon after the unlocking the entrance door, Pete pushed it open. "Now you have to do something, you master detectives!" he said goodbye. "Good luck!"

"Okay, Pete. See you later."

"Sure you don't want to come?" Bob asked. He was still hoping for support.

"No, thanks. I'm gonna go upstairs and look at the stars."

Pete saw his friends disappearing into the dark entrance. Quietly the door behind them was shut. All right. He turned around and walked out the gate and over the narrow headland back to land. He had switched on the flashlight as it was pitch dark in the meantime.

As Pete was climbing up the hill, he stopped and turned to look at the castle. Through one of the windows, he saw Jupiter's flashlight flickering. As the light moved on, Pete continued his climb to their camp site.

There was a strange, muffled silence. It was probably due to the light fog that was still hanging in the air. The wind stopped blowing, too.

When he reached the top, Pete was breathing a little faster as he felt the high altitude. He leaned sideways against a tree trunk, breathed more calmly and looked down at the lake. Behind him the forest rose up like a black wall.

Perhaps it had been the wrong decision not to go into the castle after all. Jupiter and Bob could now solve MacHeart's second puzzle while he sat here in the cold, silent night. But the place wasn't that quiet.

Slowly Pete heard more and more noises. They came from the forest—scattered bird calls, a few cracking branches. "Don't go crazy," he told himself. "It's all normal." He yawned.

Jupiter's light had since moved on. A moment ago it had flickered on the right side of the tower, now it was shining a few windows to the left. Anyway, it just flashed up there for a second. But it couldn't have been that fast.

Pete watched the tower. Now everything was dark. Perhaps his friends went further back in the tower. Then the light came back on. To be on the safe side, he continuously had his eyes on the castle.

Suddenly he froze. On another window, a light appeared. However, it was a light of a different colour. It flickered bluish and was not very bright. The fog made it look almost spooky. Clearly, there were lights coming through two windows. And his friends only had one flashlight with them!

Pete started to sweat. That could only mean one thing—Jupe and Bob were not alone in the castle! Or had they found another lamp? Perhaps a candle? It could be. Then everything would be normal.

"Just don't get crazy," Pete told himself again. It's easy to see ghosts in a place like this. He decided to wait a little longer. He leaned further forward to have a better view of everything.

But just at that moment, a hand came from behind and clasp around his mouth.

## 10. No More Fun

After Pete had opened the entrance door for them and then said goodbye, Jupiter and Bob were alone in the Black Tower.

"Whew," Bob said. "It's a little spooky!"

"After all, unlike the prince, we didn't need a herb witch to get in here, only Pete's lock picks." Jupiter switched on the flashlight.

They went in another the door which led into a reception hall. An old mirror hung directly opposite the door and Jupiter was initially frightened by the light of his own flashlight reflecting from there. There was a cupboard in the room, two chests of drawers and in each corner, a large antique chair.

Bob went to the drawers that was under the mirror. "Jupe, shine the light over here," he said.

Jupiter dropped the beam of the flashlight in Bob's direction. On the chest of drawers was a plastic box with a thick pack of notebooks. Bob pulled one out. "Glen MacHeart: *Valley of Tears*. Episode 33," he read triumphantly. He showed Jupiter the front page.

"I didn't expect anything else," said Jupiter. "This woman must be involved." He shone a light on the picture that hung over the drawers. A portrait. "Aha!"

"Who is that?" Bob asked.

"Charles Edward Stuart, the Scottish prince. He really did exist."

"He doesn't look at all like I imagined him in *Valley of Tears*," Bob was really disappointed. "I had more in mind some Hollywood actor!"

"Well, reality is often boring," Jupiter smiled. "And our classmates in the UK probably see far less Scottish heritage than we do at the moment."

"Maybe there are real ghosts out there," Bob said.

"Well, I wouldn't go that far," Jupe said. "You know how I feel about that. There are no ghosts."

Bob put the notebooks back in the box. "It's always reassuring to be brought down to earth by you, Jupe. I prefer it without ghosts, too. Whether be it in Scotland or here."

"The other day at the beach you spoke differently," Jupe quipped.

"Well, that was then," Bob said as Jupiter was still standing in the middle of the room. "Where do we go from here?" he asked.

Jupiter pointed at a door. "We'll take that one."

They came into a narrow, elongated room. Between the windows stood an old knight's armour. But Jupiter and Bob initially only had eyes for the paintings hanging on the other long side of the room. Jupiter let the beam of the flashlight wander over the paintings. Disappointed, he found that the painting Glen had described in his story was not among them. They were all just portraits.

"This ghost here looks very familiar to me," Jupiter suddenly said and laughed.

"What, a ghost?" Bob flinched visibly and bumped into the armour.

"No... Look out, Bob. The armour! Hold it!"

There was a loud clatter. "Oh no! Now I've knocked over the armour!"

They started to set up the armour again. Bob moaned. "Pretty heavy, that boy. Like there's another body in there. What did you see just now?"

"There he is again. Look!" Jupiter shone a light on a painting and Bob had to laugh out loud. It was a portrait of a man—a large head, semi bald, drooping cheeks and eyelids, not unlike a cocker spaniel. Strictly and critically, he looked down at them from his venerable golden frame.

"Well, well. Our great idol and patron, the famous Alfred Hitchcock!" Bob said. "He's sure to bring us luck. That's probably what you'll look like in forty years, Jupe, or even much earlier..."

"Bob, your career as a detective is very straightforward if you continue like this," Jupiter replied without any hint of humour.

"It's all right, Jupe, let's keep moving. Didn't Mr Hitchcock just wink?"

"It's an oil painting," Jupe quipped.

"I was under the impression—"

"Come on!" Jupe exclaimed. "Let's get going!"

They hurried on and entered a dining room, in the middle of which was a long dark wooden table with numerous high-backed chairs.

"Look, Jupe, on the walls!"

"The cobwebs?"

"No, those weird devices."

"These are instruments of torture," explained Jupiter. "Here, this is a thumbscrew, a torture chair with sharp nails, a torture wheel..."

Bob stopped. "Do you think they're real?" He huddled close to Jupiter.

"It's possible," Jupiter said calmly. He was impressed by the collection. "We are obviously in the home of a fanatic. No object is safe from her passion for collecting." He shone the flashlight at other instruments of torture.

"Jupe, I'm not that comfortable," Bob said. "Where is the art gallery with the painting we're looking for?"

"Seventeen more rooms and thirteen trap doors."

"Huh?"

"Gee, Bob, I don't know." The First Investigator sat down on one of the wooden chairs and supported his elbows on the dining table. He smiled at his friend. "It must be delightful to dine among all these torturers."

"Well, I, for one, prefer a burger," Bob said.

"You're being a little silly," Jupiter said.

"Still better than being cynical," Bob quipped.

"Wait, stop!" Jupiter whispered and suddenly pulled Bob to him by the sleeve and switched off the flashlight. "There was something," he breathed.

"I heard nothing," Bob whispered startled.

"I think it came from over there," Jupiter said, pointing to a door. He quietly got up.

They groped their way forward and reached the door. Jupiter opened it and they went through. Suddenly Bob's hand touched something cold. "Please, Jupe, turn on the light for a moment," he whispered trembling. Jupiter turned on the flashlight.

They found themselves in a corridor, on both sides of which were more knight's armours. Bob looked at the nearest one. "I don't know, Jupe, it looks at me. Do you think there's someone in there?" Jupiter switched off the light and closed the door behind him.

"Don't talk nonsense! Who's supposed to be in those armours?" He fell into his lecturing tone. "Besides, people used to be much smaller. Nowadays only a child can fit in there."

"I don't feel very comfortable here anyway," mumbled Bob.

"A fine way for saying that you are afraid," Jupe said softly. Bob could literally feel his friend grinning—but there was a very insecure grin. Bob clearly noticed a trembling undertone in Jupiter's voice.

In the dark they groped their way forward. "Wait, Bob," whispered Jupiter suddenly. "Can you feel the cool breeze even though we closed the door behind us?"

"Yes. There must be something else." Bob's voice became thin. "I don't think we're alone here, Jupe.

"I'm afraid so. Listen, there's a wolf howling outside."

"I don't think that's from outside, Jupe. That's inside. And it sure isn't a wolf."

"You're right, Bob." Jupiter moved one step forward. "Sounds more like... like a bagpipe." Suddenly he felt something fluttering above him. Jupiter tore up his arm in defence. With a muffled sound the object hit him on the head and Jupiter stumbled. "Ouch!"

The flashlight fell to the ground and rolled away.

"Jupe!" Bob tried to help him up and bent over.

"Ow," cried Jupiter again. "Something hard hit me."

"Oh, sorry, Jupe, that was me this time," Bob said. "Or the king," he corrected himself.

"What? You brought the statue?"

"Yes, since that night in the tent..."

Jupiter muttered something and groped for the statue on the ground. He picked it up and put it in Bob's hand. "There."

"Thank you." Bob put it back in the inside pocket of his jacket.

"Where is that flashlight?" Jupe hissed.

"I don't know," Bob said. "We must find it at all costs."

They crouched on the floor and slid around on their knees searching. But they could not get hold of the flashlight.

"Damn it," cursed Jupiter. "Where is it, that stupid flash—ow, oh, no!"

His hand was caught on a rope. A deafening noise started, a few flashes of lightning flared up. In the brief bright moments, they saw a strange haze crawling towards them from the corners. Trembling, Bob pressed himself against Jupiter. He was also closed to losing control.

"Let's move back to the door slowly," Jupiter suggested, when it suddenly became quiet again. The fog was still in the air.

At that moment the draft became stronger. They sensed that the door opened behind them. In the darkness, two bluish eyes flickered open. Metal steps clank on the stone floor. A shrill giggle became audible.

"Jupe, that's not a person!" Bob cried.

"I know that too, Bob," Jupe whispered. "Calm down, or we don't stand a chance."

"Then what is it?"

"I am the Ruler of the Black Tower," a voice snarled, followed by more giggling.

Then Jupiter jumped up.

"Jupe!" Bob heard a rattling sound. The bluish light laid on the ground and went out.

"Go, Bob," cried Jupiter, "turn on the ceiling lights."

Bob groped his way along the wall and found a switch. He pushed, but nothing happened.

"Damn!" He crawled back, but struck an elongated piece of metal with his elbow. "Our flashlight!"

In the beam of the flashlight, Bob saw Jupiter cowering in the billowing fog over a knight's armour.



"It was a robot," Jupiter said.

"How did you know?"

"I did not know. I just hoped. I wanted to do the unexpected and I just jumped at it."

"With success," Bob said. The fright was still in his limbs.

"There you go. No need to panic," Jupiter said as he sat up. "Somehow we must have triggered the robot. There's probably more of those things around here."

Jupiter stood up and kicked lightly with his foot against the metal of the armour. "Well, little knight, I guess this was your last battle."

"And the other events? The lightning? The fog? Do you think it all happened automatically?" Bob was not yet completely convinced.

Jupiter nodded. "Sure. Give me the flashlight. Look here—the fog comes from very simple fog generator, such as those found at rock concerts." He kept looking and picked up a sack. "And here is the thing that came through the air—a bagpipe that was attached to a rope for swinging. No gangsters, no ghosts. We started the haunting ourselves. Look, there's a light barrier here, for example." Jupiter pointed to two small holes, which were exactly opposite each other on the side walls. "Presumably, this is to chase away intruders. Look, there are two more there."

Bob wiped his sleeve across his forehead. "Whew, that was quite a shock, anyway. The Ruler has a sense for effects. It reminds me a little of our Terror Castle case, remember?"

"Sure. I remember that perfectly. We got a little scared back then too." Jupiter looked at his watch. "But now on to the art gallery. We better hurry, we've lost far too much time already. And we cannot assume that that woman would be away for long."

"So let's get out of this creepy room!" Bob agreed.

They left the knight's hall and entered the next room.

"It's the art gallery," sighed Bob. "At last."

Jupiter first shone along the right wall. There were about ten paintings, all with clearly Scottish motifs. The painting they were looking for was not among them. Then he inspected the left side of the wall.

"No, no, no again... Ahhh, here it is."

"Indeed. *The Battle of Culloden*," Bob read off a small sign. "So they say. What was that from MacHeart again?"

"*The prince calmly projected an imaginary line from the bayonet of the front English soldier...*" Jupiter quoted by heart. "*It gave him the decisive hint.*"

Bob looked at the painting. "Look, there is the soldier, and there is the bayonet. The imaginary line projects along here... Maybe there's something underneath."

"Let's have a look." Jupiter went to the wall and took the painting down. There was nothing behind it. He knocked on the wall, it sounded solid. So there is no secret compartment.

"Any button, Jupe? Or a mechanism?"

Jupiter ran his palm over the wall once more. "No, no indentation, no groove, nothing."

Bob shrugged his shoulders. "Maybe the line goes further, maybe this cave painting on the left gets in the way."

Jupiter took down the cave painting and examined the wall. Then they examined the entire extension of the line down to the ground. Nothing. Disappointed, they sat down on the carpet and looked at the wall once more.

Suddenly Bob stopped and smiled. "We are so stupid that it is almost a miracle that we are the most successful detectives of Rocky Beach," he said slowly.

"Well, well, Bob!" Jupiter remarked. "What is it?"

“Jupe, it’s simple,” Bob explained. “I’m talking about the other painting on the left, the one we just took down.”

“Of course!” Jupiter took the painting that he had put aside and put it back on the wall. Depicted in the painting was a cave. The sun is shown behind the mountains in the background.

“The title of the painting is *Sunrise in the Bear Cave: Mount Heaven ’n Hell in July*,” Bob read. “So this scene was at sunrise and not sunset. Jupe, why the sunrise in the bear cave? The sun rises behind the mountains.”

“Look, there is an opening in the ceiling of the cave,” Jupiter said. “A thick ray of sunlight shines into the cave. In this respect the sun also rises inside the cave. A natural phenomenon!”

“Great. Now I see it too.” Bob looked at the painting from close up. “At the bottom, the beam marks a spot. The painter has emphasized this point in particular. I’m sure this has meaning!”

“Here’s another big clue,” Jupiter said. “If you stand back and look at both paintings, you can see that the bayonet of the front soldier in *The Battle of Culloden* painting points straight to the same spot marked by the beam in the cave painting!”

“Yes, that must be the solution!” Bob exclaimed. “Follow the imaginary line from the bayonet to the spot on the cave painting!”

Jupiter took a short break to put his thoughts in order.

“And it’s July now,” Jupe continued. “So let’s go to Mount Heaven ’n Hell. First thing in the morning. Pete will be pleased. No need to sleep in.”

“But the mountain must be in Scotland,” Bob interjected.

“No. Mount Heaven ’n Hell—I’ve seen it on the map,” Jupiter triumphed. “It’s a mountain around here!”

Bob jumped. “Great, Jupe, then we have the solution,” he cried. “This has to be the way to the manuscript! Johnny can always count on us for help. The Three Investigators are the best.”

“Yes, you’re the best,” said a cold voice behind them. It was so sudden that it shocked the two detectives. “But now the fun is over. Hands up! You two are gonna have to quit this Glen MacHeart game.”

Jupiter and Bob spun around. They looked into the muzzle of a gun that looked old but very functional.

## 11. Encounter in the Night

Meanwhile, Pete tried with all his strength to free his mouth from the hand that was clutching him tightly. He got hold of the forearm and wanted to throw the opponent over himself. But it failed. Physically the attacker seemed to be inferior to him, but he had a lot of good karate moves.

Pete's supporting leg received a powerful blow. He fell forward on his stomach. Already the opponent lay on him and pressed him to the ground. Pete managed to grab a branch and wanted to throw it around. But immediately he felt his arm being clamped. He had no chance.

For a few moments, the fight had been fierce but silent. Pete was all the more surprised when he was suddenly addressed. "Slowly, slowly, my friend," the attacker whispered into his ear and loosened the grip. "Okay, let's not fight. Truce?"

Was it a boy? Pete relaxed his muscles. The attacker let go of him completely and sat up breathing heavily. So they paused for a moment. The fight had taken a lot of energy. In the darkness Pete could only see the attacker in a shadowy way. His head hurt again.

"You're a real tough guy," the attacker said, panting. Pete startled. It was not a boy, as he had first assumed—it was a woman!

"I had to use all my tricks, and I am not bad at martial arts," she added. Her voice sounded like a peace offering.

Pete went into it carefully. "I noticed that. It's easier to fight a bear." He could feel her smiling.

"Actually, I didn't mean to attack you," she said. "I just didn't want you to yell and alert someone." The woman started looking for something in her bag.

Pete registered it attentively. "What would you have done in my place?" he asked. "Are you the woman from the castle there?"

"No." She laughed. "Absolutely not. I am a ranger with Kings Canyon."

"You're a ranger?" He looked at her in astonishment. "Do you also have the famous Smokey Bear ranger hat?"

"Sure. It's still in the woods by my stuff." She breathed out slowly. "Look, the moon is about to rise."

Pete looked up. The sky had actually become a little brighter. "And what are you doing in the park?"

"I take care of the animals and plants," she said.

"Oh, yeah? And besides, you pursue your hobby of assaulting harmless hikers?"

The woman had obviously found what she was looking for in her bag. "Unfortunately, I didn't know that you and your friends were harmless from the beginning," she said and switched on a flashlight. "My name's Monica, by the way."

"Hi. I'm Pete." Now he could finally see her properly.

She was a little smaller than him and maybe early- or mid-twenties, sporty, wiry, straight brown hair, with an open, interested face. Nevertheless, Pete was still not quite sure what to think of her.

Monica noticed his look. "You're looking at me very critically," she said.

"Sorry. Wasn't my intention. But I don't have such an encounter every day."

"I can imagine." She had placed the flashlight in front of her with the bulb up so that they were both lit.

"Although this is probably not our first encounter..." Pete touched his head, where a bump reminded him of the incident in the log cabin.

"I'm afraid you're right." Monica said. "Did you see me after all, in the log cabin?"

"No, but my friend Bob described how skilfully you jumped away through the bushes. His description fits you pretty well." Pete got up. "I'll get us some herbal tea," he suggested. "It's left over from dinner and should still be warm."

She nodded. "Good idea, thanks." Monica waited until he came back. "I had actually expected a bear hunter in the cabin," she explained.

"Bear hunter?" He handed her the Thermos flask and she took a sip.

"Bear hunter, yes. The woman who lives there in the castle and who owns this area here, rents the cabin to bear hunters—poachers—mostly some rich guys who want to satisfy themselves with this cruel outdated activity that they see as a sport. Of course, it is forbidden to hunt bears here, even if this is private property. Not to mention the fact that these guys are also poaching in the grounds of the park." She handed him back the flask. "I went to the cabin to find evidence."

"So that's why you were there? And when you heard noises, you hid upstairs. And then I came up..."

"Yes, and I smacked you on the head. I thought it was some guy. I had received the tip that another bear hunter was expected in the area. I'm really sorry, Pete. I hope it wasn't too hard."

"Well..." Pete held his head. "Here, you can feel it, there's a bump."

She felt it through his hair. "Really, really thick. Thank goodness you have a hard skull."

Pete smiled. "Why does that woman rent the cabin to guys like that anyway?" he asked. "Let me guess—she needs money!"

"Yes, she needs money urgently," Monica replied. "Her name is Peg MacWeiden, and by the way, she's totally crazy. She spends her last cent on her Scottish hobby. That castle was imported stone by stone from Scotland and reassembled here. She could sell her property to the National Park to get money. It would complement the park well. We from the park have tried many times and offered her other land in exchange. But so far, she has refused." Monica looked at him. "The tea is good, is there any left?"

"A little left, yes. Is that MacWeiden's only source of income?"

"No, of course not," she replied. "Her hobby costs far too much money. She actually runs a publishing house. Maybe you've seen the show *Valley of Tears*. It's their greatest success."

Pete was just able to overplay his surprise. He nodded quickly and said, "Sure, those trashy novels—written by Glen MacHeart."

"Right! I even know Glen personally," Monica said. "What are you looking at, Pete? Did I say something wrong?"

Another surprise. "Oh, uh... nothing. I just think it's great that you know such a famous writer," Pete replied. "What kind of guy is he?"

"Oh, I think he's very nice," she said, throwing her hair back. "One who has a thousand crazy things on his mind. He really had to work for MacWeiden with fixed hours, like an office job. But when he comes here to Kings Canyon, he is relaxed from his day's work."

"And you? You met him here in the park?" Pete shook the Thermos. "Oh, you left a little sip in there for me! Thanks a lot."

"Sure. Glen used to hike with me. I offer nature tours here and Glen was often with me for several days. He's a big fan of the park." She paused.

“But not a big fan of MacWeiden?” Pete asked.

She looked at him in surprise. “Right, at least not anymore. I think he even hates her. He had signed a five-year contract with her for his novels—without profit sharing, only for a small fixed salary. At that time he was still completely unknown and MacWeiden had a small, inconspicuous publishing house. He had already written several stories until he made his big breakthrough with *Valley of Tears*. Well, and MacWeiden then struck it rich from the story, while he continued to receive only his ridiculously small fixed salary.”

“And now his contract’s about to expire?”

“Pete, you’re starting to creep me out! Do you know about him as well?”

Pete raised his hands defensively. “No, no. I’m just thinking.” He smiled at her.

“Thinking is my hobby, so to speak,” he added.

“Hmm. Yeah, you’re definitely on the right track. Actually, his contract has expired and Glen wants to retire now. He wants to stop writing and go to Canada, especially since this story of Scotland never really suited him anyway. Peg MacWeiden practically forced it on him. She said that a large part of the American public yearns for its European roots.”

Pete sighed. “I guess she saw right. And to make everything sound better, she gave him this weird pen name?”

“Yes,” Monica agreed. “I don’t know if she gave him that pseudonym or he made it up himself. He never told me his real name, by the way.”

“He probably has a very simple name, something like Johnny Smith or something,” Pete tried to trigger off something, but he was not successful with that. Monica didn’t react when Pete mentioned the name ‘Johnny’.

“I don’t know,” she said and took a break. “Is asking people questions part of your hobby?”

“In a way, yes.” Pete grinned and just tried again. “Did you actually cut up our tent?”

She looked at him in surprise. “Your tent? Cut? No, definitely not me. But I know that there’s another man hanging around.”

“The blond man,” Pete threw in.

“Yeah, that’s right, did you see him, too? I suspect he’s a bear hunter.”

“He could be,” Pete said. He thought of the elongated object the man was carrying, which was possibly a weapon. If he was indeed a bear hunter and not looking for the manuscript, this would also explain why he did not hesitate to tell them the way to the Black Tower.

Pete looked into the night. “Where do you sleep, Monica—in a tent?”

“Me? Certainly not. I sleep in the open.”

“I should have guessed.” Pete smiled at her. He had already made up his mind. He took a fancy to her. “Just one more question—why did you try to stop me from yelling earlier?”

“So you don’t alert whoever is in the castle. I don’t want Peg MacWeiden to know I’m on her trail.” Monica looked around. “Where are your friends, anyway?”

Pete got up. “You won’t believe it. They are now in the castle!” He saw her surprised look. “I’ll explain later, Monica. Now I better go see what’s going on down there.”

## 12. Milady Appears

While Pete struck up an acquaintance with Monica and received valuable information from her, the situation in the castle became more and more precarious for Jupiter and Bob in view of the gun pointed at them.

“Well, what can we do with this thing pointing at us, even though it must be a hundred years old,” Jupiter remarked as he raised his hands. “Bob, we better do what the man says.”

Bob also raised his hands. “Sounds convincing, Jupe. Maybe we’ll find out who this nice gentleman with the antique cannon is.”

“I don’t know, he looks a little withdrawn,” Jupe said.

The man waved his gun back and forth. “Save yourself the ramblings, gentlemen! I am George, the servant of Lady MacWeiden! And I overheard everything!”

Gritting his teeth, Jupiter looked at the man who had obviously tricked them. He was a little taller than Jupiter, had short stubby black hair. Jupiter thought that the hooked nose fitted perfectly into his somewhat crooked face.

“Then this was a trap?” he asked the man.

The servant smiled triumphantly. “Very well, gentlemen. We have been keeping an eye on you for some time. Milady preferred to go on a little trip, and I had a quite amusing task of ambushing you here. You gentlemen have kindly served me all the information about the manuscript in the best possible way!” He took an ironic bow. “Thank you for that story about the cave. We never would have thought of that.”

Unimpressed, Jupiter asked further. “What did Glen write to you?”

“I see you gentlemen are well-informed. He wrote to tell us to watch out for an old herb witch who would come to visit our castle.” He pointed his gun alternately at Bob and Jupiter. “And now we don’t have a herb witch here, but we have two pretty rookies.”

Bob wanted to say something, but Jupiter hissed at him: “Don’t let him provoke you.”

He turned back to the man with the gun. “Your spookiness was really very impressive, Mr George,” Jupiter said, to buy time. “Was that magic your creation?”

“At your service and pleasure, and especially mine,” George replied. “Lady MacWeiden really appreciates these spooky interludes and from time to time I invent something new. We rarely have visitors here, so I am glad that my little ideas have met with such approval.”

Jupiter decided to continue grabbing him by his pride. “Mr George, I was very impressed with the flying bagpipes. How did you do that?”

The servant smiled contentedly. “The bagpipes, yes, they hang on a rope. It is released when you pass through a light barrier. Then you stand exactly at the point to which it flies. And really, gentlemen, it was a direct hit.” He giggled to himself.

“Now off to the dungeon, boys,” he suddenly said in a completely different tone. “We’re losing too much time.” To underline his request, he raised his gun.

Secretly Jupiter had feared such a turn of events. At first, he did not move from the spot. “And you, are you also from Scotland?” he asked.

“Oh, yes. Lady MacWeiden brought me here. First me and then the whole castle.” He giggled again. “Now we two live here in heavenly peace—except for the ghosts, of course—

which we brought here from Scotland together with the old walls thanks to my little help. And except for the rare visit of uninvited guests..."

"Where to, sir?" Jupiter asked.

"This way!" George pointed his gun at the dining room.

Jupiter and Bob set themselves in motion as slowly as possible. At a snail's pace they crossed the dining room. Jupiter let his gaze wander and then pointed to the instruments of torture. "You're really into these things?" he wanted to know.

"Of course, gentlemen. They've squeezed out a lot of secrets!"

Disgusted, Bob took a step. He did not want to stay longer than necessary in the room with those devices—before George got any ideas... How clumsy of Juve to talk to him about the instruments! But he also noted that the First Investigator accelerated the pace.

They entered the art gallery again, walked past the armour that Bob knocked over, and then reached the portraits that were hanging on the walls. As they passed, Jupiter looked at the people depicted and recognized a few more famous British personalities like Christopher Lee and Agatha Christie. But the greatest painting was that of Alfred Hitchcock and of all portraits they were asked to stop in front of his.

"Gentlemen, please stop." George grinned his mouth. "Let's wait a minute."

The two detectives heard the castle's gate creak. Apparently Peg MacWeiden had returned. Shortly afterwards the door opened. A woman entered and the atmosphere in the room changed instantly. It felt cooler and electrified. The woman was quite a bit smaller than the servant and also a bit fuller, but with her pointed, energetic chin, she had a face at least as distinctive as his.

Jupiter estimated her to be in her mid-thirties. Her hair was dyed blonde, but the hairline had already grown dark.

"Good evening, Lady MacWeiden," said the servant, bowing in perfect form. "Meet our two uninvited guests. Unfortunately the names have not yet been revealed to me. It all worked out perfectly, milady. Even the ghosts appeared. They would have had their fun."

"Very nice, George." Peg MacWeiden coolly inspected the boys from top to bottom. "May I have your names, please?" That sounded more like an order.

"Bob Andrews."

"And I am Jupiter Jones. You'll be sorry you kept us here, Mrs MacWeiden."

She laughed shrilly. "Thanks for your concern, fatty." Her tone became ironic. "I can't send you out into the dangerous wilderness. Shouldn't we invite your friend in? We're always happy to have guests..."

Jupiter felt that her reference to his corpulence had hit him. "Invite him in? He'll have us out of here before you've had your evening tea."

She smiled thinly. "Oh, we're terrified. Right, George? Have you given these gentlemen a search yet?"

"I haven't got around to that yet, milady." George gave her his gun and stepped in on Jupiter. "Would the young gentleman please..."

Jupiter raised his arms and the servant tapped him. He then examined the bags, but found nothing that interested him. But Bob got anxious. Under his jacket was the statue of the king. In the tent he had managed to save the statue, but now...

"So, now you, laddie!" George turned to Bob. In the next moment the servant pulled the statue out. "What have we here? The missing statue of the king! Thank you very much, gentlemen. You really are very generous."

Bob and Jupiter looked at each other with consternation. Now everything had gone wrong. George triumphantly presented the statue to Lady MacWeiden.

She nodded to him. "Very nice, George. Now please let us check if the hinges still work."  
"Very well, milady."

Jupiter noticed too late why they had to stop at this very spot. Narrow joints were visible on the ground. MacWeiden had already taken a step back. The servant pulled a handle which was under the picture of Alfred Hitchcock. The floor opened up. Bob and Jupiter fell on a slide and disappeared into a dark room. They landed rudely on the ground one floor below.

Horrified, Jupiter looked up at the opening in the ceiling to the faces of George and his lady.

"When are you going to let us out of here?" he shouted.

The lady answered: "When we have the rest of the manuscript—maybe. Because we're not gonna pass up this opportunity, fat boy."

"Who is Johnny?" Bob cried, as Jupiter was obviously speechless.

"Johnny? Isn't that your friend?" The servant giggled. "Have fun down there."

The door creaked shut, the slide flipped up.

Jupiter stood up furiously. "They're a pain in the ass, those two up there. All that fancy talk!" He kicked hard at a piece of wood lying around. "And for that fat remarks, she can save it, that fake witch!"

"But, Jupe," Bob said with a grin. "She should have seen you a month ago." As bad as he thought the situation was, Bob was having a great time because Jupiter hadn't kept his cool.

Jupiter had not finished letting off steam. "Stupid game!" he shouted out loud. He bumped into a chest of drawers and began to search them. Finally he found a lighter and lit it. They were in a basement room that was crammed to the last corner with boxes and other junk. Bob found a candle and handed it to Jupiter.

"We fell right into the trap," said Jupiter and shone around. "It's lack of respect, by the way, to hang a picture of Alfred Hitchcock over the trap door."

"He probably would have thought it was funny, with his peculiar sense of humour," Bob remarked.

"As long as you don't fall into that trap yourself..." Jupiter came back to the point. "Bob, we have to get out of here as soon as possible. Otherwise, our search for manuscript is over. We also need to find out who this Johnny really is and how this lady took him out of the picture."

Bob laughed sarcastically. "I'd also like to know how she knew we were going to help Johnny." He patted the dust off his pants. "This woman seems to know everything."

"Well, she just saw us standing at that drop-off point a couple days ago." Jupiter placed the candle on an old wooden table.

"Right," Bob said. "She may indeed have been the woman in the black Mercedes. The hair colour is right. She probably even called the police on us. But she wasn't the woman in the cabin. She was slimmer—and sportier."

"You mean your MacKangaroo?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Bob said and then moaned. "I hope Pete finally gets us out of here. He must have noticed something."

"I don't know, Bob," Jupe said. "This George with his old Scottish gun will be difficult to overcome. We'll just have to figure something out for ourselves. Come, let's see what's around here."

They rummaged through the rubble that piled up at the sides and corners. Apparently the room was used as a storeroom. Cabinets and chests of drawers, bagpipes, tartan caps, empty whisky bottles—everything was in a mess.



“Worse than Uncle Titus at the salvage yard,” muttered Jupiter, while throwing aside a few rusty spoons.

Suddenly Bob cried out. “A telephone. And the line is still connected! There is also a dial tone.”

Jupiter jumped in. “Give me that, Bob.”

Jupiter grabbed the phone and picked up the receiver. He hesitated briefly and then dialled a number. “I’ll call Inspector Cotta, he can arrange everything else.”

### 13. Fire!

The phone seemed to work. Somebody picked up. "Jupiter Jones here, is Inspector Cotta there?"

"I'm very sorry. George here. Do our uninvited gentlemen down there have any requests?"

"Yes, a triple whisky," Jupiter shouted angrily into the receiver and slammed the phone down.

Bob started to laugh. "Come on, Juve, let's see. I'm sure there's a lot more to discover here."

First, they systematically examined the walls. There was a door, but it was locked. Then Jupiter and Bob stacked several boxes on top of each other to get to the trap door in the ceiling. But it could not be opened, no matter how hard Jupiter braced himself against it.

"No chance! Hopeless," said Jupiter discouraged and climbed down again. "I admit I'm at a loss." He kept digging around in all that junk. "Look, a kilt!"

"Aren't you even gonna put it on, Juve? It would have looked great on you." Bob smiled.

"I'm not gonna let you have all the fun, Bob. Not after you put the king in their hands."

Outraged, Bob jumped down from a box. "That's unfair! At least I saved the statue when the tent was cut open! If you'd put it at your foot, it would've been gone long ago."

Jupiter gave Bob a big look. "Hmm." Then he held the kilt in front of his stomach. "I wonder what the statue is all about. This disgusting servant was delighted to get it."

"So obviously they knew what it was for," Bob said.

"Yeah. It also probably has something to do with the cave. But what?" Jupiter held up the kilt and examined it. "Really just an ordinary kilt. I've never held one of these in my hands before. Look, there are even some mini-mirrors embedded in the pattern. I wonder if it's original Scottish." In the pale light of the candle he made them flash.

"This is it," cried Bob.

"What is it?"

"The mirrors, Juve. The statue has a little mirror on his belly. With it you can deflect the sunbeam in the cave. "If there are other statues in the game who also have mirrors..."

"... this results in lines and intersections if you follow the beam," added Jupiter excitedly. "Of course! You probably have to put the statue in the cave to reflect the beam of light to find some new point."

"And that's where the last part of the manuscript is hidden," Bob shouted and jumped up.

"Yes, that should be it. As we're stuck here, we can't do anything." Angrily Jupiter threw away the kilt.

Silently both continued to rummage around the pile. Finally, Jupiter listlessly pulled out a fog generator.

"Appears to be George's ghost chamber. In the box are also the other components. He scared us with this stuff." He put the device on the table.

"Watch out for the candle," cried Bob. "If all this old junk starts burning, we're doomed."

Jupiter just caught the wobbling candle. “Oops! But look, there’s still a fire extinguisher back there.”

Bob laughed. “That old thing?” Goodness, Jupe, if that still works. This stuff burns in seconds! We have no chance.”

Jupiter agreed with him. He put the candle upright again. “Fire...” he muttered to himself as he pressed the candle into the holder. “Fire... Bob, I think I have an idea.”

Carefully, Pete and Monica climbed down the hill to the lake. In order not to be noticed, they had switched off their flashlights.

After a while, they reached the headland that led to the small island. The tower loomed darkly in front of them. Pete stopped briefly. The castle lay silent and dismissive in the fog. Not a sound got through to them. Two windows were lit. From time to time they could see shadows moved at the windows.

Pete was not sure if the woman with the off-road vehicle had come back in the meantime. The encounter with Monica had distracted him and also cost him time.

Suddenly the lights went out. Now the tower was completely dark. Pete looked at his watch. It was just after midnight. “Come on,” he hissed at Monica. But at the same moment he held her back. “The castle’s gate is opening,” he whispered.

Monica nodded and pulled him behind a bush. Both ducked and watched as two lights came on and an engine was started. “The off-road vehicle,” Pete said. “So she came back after all.”

“She must have come back on foot,” said Monica. “Otherwise I would have heard it.”

“Or it could be a second vehicle,” whispered Pete.

“Look, someone else is getting in.”

“Yeah. I wonder if that’s one of your friends.”

The car drove off and stopped a few metres away from them. A man got out.

“Duck,” hissed Pete. It was unnecessary, Monica was almost stuck to the ground. Fortunately, the man did not come any closer, but went back and closed the gate. Pete raised his head and looked over. “Not Jupiter after all. Damn, where did this guy come from! Something’s gone wrong!”

“We’ll get your friends out of this,” Monica said.

“We have to,” Pete agreed. “Watch out, the car’s coming.”

They ducked deep into the damp grass again. They watched as the car had passed them and the tail lights disappeared into the woods.

“Let’s go!” Pete jumped up and Monica followed him. They reached the gate in a few seconds. Pete pulled out his lock pick collection. The gate’s lock was no problem. They sprinted forward to the entrance door.

“Strange,” said Pete as he examined the entrance door. “There’s a heavy lock here. It wasn’t there earlier.” He inspected the lock and became more and more nervous. “Earlier, it was easy, but I don’t think I can crack this one!”

“Anyway, it’s a mystery to me how you’re gonna unlock this. Another one of your hobbies?” Monica smiled at him.

“Yes, but not the way you think. Dismantling locks are only for emergencies. We are not burglars, on the contrary, we are detectives!”

“Detectives?”

“Yes. The Three Investigators from Rocky Beach, and we investigate anything. If it wasn’t this urgent matter, I’d show you our business card.” He continued working on the

lock.

“I’ve been wondering what you guys are doing here all this time anyway,” Monica said. “Are you investigating Peg MacWeiden?”

“Only indirectly. It’s about your friend, Glen MacHeart. We are looking for his manuscript.”

“Oh!” Monica was catching her breath. “A manuscript by Glen? That’s interesting.”

“More of that later. Now let’s get this lock opened...” He kept poking around in the lock. He was so nervous that he could not even open a simple lock. “It won’t work, it just won’t work!” he exclaimed. Desperately he looked at Monica. “Don’t you want to see if there’s another way in?”

“Sure!” Monica nodded. “Sure there is. Wait a minute.”

The ranger ran away over the headland and reappeared after a few minutes, which seemed like ages to Pete. She had a rope in her hand. She skilfully tied a noose. Then she threw the end of the rope up the wall. At the third attempt, she caught one of the battlements.

“Wow! Pete was impressed. “I shouldn’t call you Monica, I should call you Tarzan.”

“I used to work as a cowgirl... Can you climb up on a rope like this?”

“I know it’s not part of basic detective training, but sport is one of my...”

“... One of your hobbies,” Monica added. “All the better. After you, please.”

Pete grabbed the rope and began to climb up the wall. After a few moments he had the climbing technique under control and a little later he pulled himself up by the battlement and stood on the castle wall. “Awesome. Come on, cowgirl.”

Monica climbed up and then pulled the rope up to her. “Better safe than sorry,” she said. “Should not leave any trace around. Nobody should see us from the outside.”

They went down a staircase and reached a small inner courtyard. There was a door here that Pete could easily unlock. Tensely they entered the interior of the Black Tower. Pete pulled his flashlight from his belt and let the beam wander. “A big table, chairs—a dining room. Look at the neat instruments of torture on the walls.”

Monica shook her head in surprise. “Peg MacWeiden has really put every penny she has into her castle.” They walked a few steps further.

“Monica, do you hear something?” Pete suddenly asked.

“Yeah, it sounds like cries for help!” Monica said.

“Geez, that’s Jupe and Bob!” Pete cried.

“I heard cries of ‘Fire!’ and ‘Help!’ but they sound muffled,” Monica said.

“They’re in danger! That way!” Pete stormed off and made his way from the dining room to the art gallery with the paintings. “This must be it, it’s getting louder.”

“It’s coming from below!” Monica cried.

Pete froze. Smoke came out of narrow cracks in the floor.

“Fire!” cried Pete. “Quick, we must help them! They’re locked in there and there’s a fire!” He shone aimlessly around the room as if he could get some ideas there.

Monica knelt down and examined the cracks. Again and again the cries for help were interrupted by loud coughing.

“It’s gotta be a trap door,” she said. “They can’t keep it up for long.” She tapped the floor. “Hang in there,” she shouted down.

## 14. A Daring Theory

Pete let the beam of the flashlight wander further around the room. "Somehow the door must open. One button, one lever. But there is nothing but paintings..." Pete talked to himself.

"Yikes," he flinched. "That's Alfred Hitchcock! And there, below him, a handle. That could be it." Pete jumped up and pulled the switch. Squeakily the floor door swung back down. Smoke was flew out of the hole. With a scream, Monica disappeared into the depths.

"Damn, she was standing right at the opening." The Second Investigator crawled up to the hole and put his head over the edge. That's when a slimy beam hit him. His eyes burned horribly, foam flakes hung in his face. "Help," cried Pete, "I can't breathe!"

"Oh, no!" Jupiter's head appeared out of the trap door. He clumsily climbed out of the opening with a fire extinguisher in his hand. "Sorry, Pete! I thought it was the servant. I wanted to lather him up with the foam from the fire extinguisher."

Now Bob also appeared in the opening. "Pete? You're here? Why do you have so much shampoo on your hair?"

Pete rubbed his sleeve across his face. "Save your jokes! You better save Monica from the fire! We're gonna get you out of here, and in return we're gonna have to listen to your stupid stories!"

"Calm down, Pete, there's no fire." With a handkerchief, Juve wiped the foam out of his friend's eyes. "The smoke is coming from a fog generator. We only simulated the fire so that the lady of the castle would open the trap door. We didn't mean to burn the castle down.

"And then with the fire extinguisher you wanted to surprise them and use the surprise to escape?" Monica said as she climbed up the boxes. "Not a bad idea!"

"Yes," Bob explained. "Using the boxes, we built stairs right next to the trap door so we could come out immediately. Hey, don't I know you from somewhere?"

"She was the woman in the log cabin," Pete explained, "where my head got bashed." He wiped some foam out of his hair. "Fellas, I'm getting a pretty good deal on this case. And always in somebody else's place."

Monica looked at him sympathetically. "Maybe it's one of your hobbies, too... Well, you're doing all right, anyway."

She turned to Jupiter and Bob. "By the way, I'm Monica, ranger from the National Park, and slayer of bear hunters."

"Ah, yes. My name is Jupiter, hello."

"I'm Bob. Thanks for helping us."

"I think we'd better get out of here before someone comes back," Pete said. "We can save the stories for later. I can't pick that lock at the entrance door, so we have to go back the way we came in."

Pete and Monica led the way to the inner courtyard, up the staircase and reached the battlement where the rope was. Monica threw the rope down and went down first, followed by Bob. Jupiter, as usual, had a bit of trouble getting down. Pete was last.

They went out the gate, raced across the narrow headland and climbed back up to the top where their tent was. When they looked back at the Black Tower, nobody came back.

Relieved, they sat down on the fallen tree trunk. After a while, they exchanged briefly about the latest events. Pete told them that Monica had mistaken them for bear hunters.

“Interesting,” Jupiter took the cue. “Then the blond man could indeed be a poacher. That would even fit. That’s why he was acting so secretive at the camp site. And that’s why he didn’t think twice about showing us the way to Peg MacWeiden.”

“Yes, I’ve figured out the same thing as well,” Pete said.

Monica took the floor. “The bear hunters usually start from the camp site,” she explained, “and the camp site warden is also involved. He probably gives them the key to the cabin, collects the money and provides them with information.”

“Anyway, I’ve been wondering what this person lives on. He hardly has any guests. And if they come, he makes unkind remarks to them.” Jupiter pinched his lower lip. Obviously, he’s reassembling the facts. “We should talk about what we know now,” he then turned to Pete and Monica. “Let’s see what you got!”

“No problem.” Monica said. “Before I start, perhaps you might be interested in a letter I received from Glen about a week ago. I happen to have it here with me.”

“A letter?” Jupiter asked. “Hmm...”

Monica pulled a piece of paper from her coat pocket. “Here, read it for yourself.”

Jupiter took the paper and read:

*Dear Monica,*

*We’ve actually already said goodbye. Today I’m going to Canada. Maybe we’ll meet again sometime. I’d like that very much. I hope that you will soon hike to our favourite place and take a look at the little paradise of Kings Canyon that we both like so much. Then think of our dream.*

*Greetings,*

*Glen*

“You got along well,” Bob remarked.

Monica nodded. “We shared a love of the park.”

“Did you ever wrestle him with your fighting techniques?” Pete grinned.

Monica laughed and shook her head.

Jupiter gave her back the letter.

“Well, Glen has a contract with the publisher, Peg MacWeiden,” Monica began. “For a small fixed salary he delivers a piece of *Valley of Tears* week after week. But in the meantime, the series has become a mega hit. Peg makes lots of money and puts it all into her Scotland hobby. Glen doesn’t get anything out of it. But now Peg’s contract with him is coming to an end.”

“And Glen sees his hour has come,” Pete continued. “Now he has the rights to the manuscript. He stages a play and has Peg, Johnny and possibly others search for the last manuscript. It’s worth a lot of money and they’re all keen on the cash. But in the end, only the person who first delivers the manuscript to the notary will get something. The nasty thing about it is that only one can be the first. So everyone’s fighting each other.”

Bob nodded. “Everyone for themselves. But the even more clever thing is—to find the manuscript, you need those statues. In this way the seekers are brought together. And they have to snatch the statues from each other. The smartest one wins, and so far, that seems to be our Peg. She’s probably already taken Johnny out, just as she was about to take us out.”

“Right.” Pete nodded sharply. “First with the slashed tyres on my car, then her servant cuts open our tent. They’ve probably been watching us for a while.”

Bob continued: “But in the tent the servant only took the manuscript but not the statue. And then he eavesdropped on Jupiter and me and threw us into the dungeon. And, unfortunately, they also got our statue. We even served them by deciphering the puzzle. And so MacWeiden has almost reached her goal.”

Jupiter interrupted his friends. “Excellent. Glen apparently wanted to take revenge on several people at once. He gives them a bait and lets them loose on each other. But for me now two questions arise. Firstly, who else did he want to take revenge on? Monica, do you know any other people who were hostile to Glen? Like this Johnny?”

“No.” She was thinking. “He never told me anything about a Johnny. But that doesn’t mean anything. Anyway, he said very little about his life besides what I told you. We mostly talked about the landscape here. He mentioned a Marc from time to time.”

“Marc?”

“Marc Walker or something. He was formerly a friend of Glen’s. He also wrote for Peg’s publishing house, but with absolutely no success. Then he became a newspaper critic and started to put down Glen’s series. He said that it was a betrayal of the old ideals, it was too kitschy or too modern or all together, I don’t know. He was probably just jealous. But Glen didn’t say much about it.”

“Interesting.” Jupiter pinched his lower lip again. “That would make him an obvious candidate.”

“What about your second question?” Bob wanted to know. “You forgot to say it.”

“No, I didn’t.” Jupiter looked at him, annoyed. “Just one thing at a time. My second question is—if the people he’s letting loose on each other have really been so bad to him, why does he risk one of them winning and getting rich? After all, Peg MacWeiden is now close to it. That’s a contradiction!”

“True,” Pete agreed. “We still have to sort that out. It’s really strange. But now tell me what’s this painting from Glen’s letter all about.”

Jupiter and Bob briefly reported the essential facts about the discovery of the second painting and the special features of the cave depicted in it.

“Mount Heaven ’n Hell,” Pete interrupted. “Then it’s clear where Peg and her servant ran off to. They are now waiting there for sunrise. Why did they disappear so early at night?”

“I happen to know that they have a cabin nearby,” said Monica. “They will sleep there and then set out for the cave before dawn.”

“... While we are simmering here in the basement,” Jupiter continued. He looked up. “Fellas, we need to get over there right now! Especially since I have a suspicion.”

“Suspicion?” Pete asked with interest.

“An answer to my second question.” Jupiter took a dramatic pause. He wanted to hear the tension crackle. When everyone was quiet, he smiled contentedly. “Maybe,” he said slowly, “maybe Johnny doesn’t exist!”

“He doesn’t exist?” Pete frowned. “Oh, then we only dreamed about the failed delivery of the letter?”

“And also the one with the punctured tyres,” Bob added with a grin. “Pure hallucination.”

“Anyway—we’re not really here,” Pete mocked. “Oooh, how scary!”

“The whole thing with Johnny could have been staged by Glen,” Jupiter replied, annoyed. “Of course, Glen wrote the letters and turned the people loose on each other. But maybe in his game we were the guarantee, so to speak, that neither a Peg MacWeiden nor a Marc Walker or anyone else would get the manuscript. He knew our reputation and thought

The Three Investigators would get it done. We will be the first to search once we have taken up the trail.”

“And he put us on the trail by feigning the failed handover to a fictitious ‘Johnny’—to make us curious.” Now Bob was on the point. “Then he slashed the tyres on Pete’s MG so that we would finally get on the story. He was sure that we would not give up and that we would be the first to find and deliver the manuscript. Could this be possible?”

“A daring theory, Jupe,” Pete said. “But it’s impressive. And very honourable for us, of course.” Jupiter and Bob nodded.

Pete continued: “Then he must have disguised as MacWeiden in the Mercedes with a wig and sunglasses in a deceptively similar way. Maybe...”

Monica shook her head. “Isn’t that a bit far-fetched?”

“As detectives, we have to consider all possibilities,” explained Jupiter somewhat pompously. “But if I’m right, it’s important that we are at the cave at sunrise.”

Bob swayed his head back and forth. “Yes, but we’ll never find this cave in the dark. After all, we don’t have an off-road vehicle.”

“Yeah, but you got me,” Monica jumped in. “I know a way and I could lead you there. Just to do you famous detectives a favour,” she said with a wink. “The main thing is that Peg doesn’t get the manuscript.”

“And how far is that?” Bob wanted to know.

“Well, you’d have to walk all night if you want to get there by sunrise,” Monica said.

“All night? Well, I hope we will not meet any bears!” Bob grumbled.



## 15. A Bitter Disappointment

Silently the small group walked along the winding path. Monica had once again explicitly pointed out to the three of them that the ascent would be difficult and they should walk slowly and carefully, especially since it was night.

Fortunately, the moon was now in the sky and soon their eyes had become accustomed to its weak, cool light. They passed bizarre rocks, which would probably not have looked so spectacular in daylight.

The landscape was simply fantastic at night, Bob found, really a charm of its own. All of a sudden he was alert. He had got over the deadlock. He watched the area attentively. From above, small streams gushed down and tumbled as waterfalls between the stones. The water glittered in the moonlight. Bob stopped and watched the spectacle. If only they weren't in such a hurry, he would have loved to stay longer there. It's a shame he could never have volunteered for such a night hike. But Jupiter, who was at the end of the group, had already caught up with him and Bob had to get moving again.

Bob wondered if Jupiter's theory was right. Had Glen really put them on the trail of the manuscript? In any case, it was right to get to it first, he thought. But how could they stop MacWeiden and George? The two of them undoubtedly used every means possible to get their hands on the papers.

Bob was briefly interrupted in his thoughts as they crossed a larger mountain stream. Then the path led on. He looked up. Pete was in front of him. And right at the front, Monica's grey ranger hat bounced in the moonlight as she showed them the way. MacKangaroo, thought Bob and smiled.

Finally, Monica seemed to want to take a break, because she stopped at the foot of a mountain slope. Bob hurried up to the ranger about the same time as Pete. Jupe came up shortly after.

A little below them was a small lake. The moon left a shiny silver trace on its black surface. Impressed they looked at the beautiful scenery. Suddenly a light wind rippled the water and made the whole lake shimmer silvery.

"Now we're halfway up the hill," Monica broke the silence and suggested a short rest.

"Whew!" Jupiter said. "I'm getting tired of this too." He wanted to settle down on the rocky ground.

"We'd better stop," Monica advised him, "or we'll tire too quickly. Besides, it's very cold tonight."

Bob nodded. "The only thing that keeps you warm is running," he said and continued with a glance at Jupiter. "Well, what you don't have in your head has to be in your legs."

Jupiter ignored that remark and changed the subject. "We really shouldn't have let that George guy fool us. I would have preferred to walk there comfortably in daylight, and then get the manuscript the next morning."

Pete was too tired for such reveries. He pulled the Thermos out of his small backpack. At the camp site they had quickly supplied themselves with the most necessary things and as the most sporty one he had been given the task to carry the provisions for everyone. "Here, folks,

a warm-up,” he encouraged the others to drink. The lighter the backpack, the easier it was for him.

“Oh, yeah, give me that!” Bob said. “It’s almost still hot.” The rest took turns drinking a few sips.

“Look,” cried Monica, pointing to the horizon. “Dawn is already beginning.” In fact, the sky seemed to get a little brighter. “We must hurry. The dangerous part of the path still lies ahead.”

Freshly strengthened, they set off. The path now became more stony and large boulders made it difficult to keep up. They passed through a deep ravine. But then the path lost its gradient and they reached a high plateau. Huge rocks rose into the deep blue of the early morning. Monica stopped and waited until the group was together again.

“Now it’s not far to Samuel’s Cave. That’s actually the real name of the cave,” she said.

“Can you see them yet?” Jupiter wanted to know.

The ranger pointed forward. “You see those two big rocks facing each other there?” They nodded and Monica went on. “Mount Heaven ’n Hell got its name from them. The left and jagged one is called Hell, the right and round one is called Heaven. On the left is the cave.” She took a break and her gaze wandered to the other rock.

Jupiter sensed that something was on the tip of her tongue. “What’s on the right side?” he asked.

She looked at him. “There’s the place that Glen and I really like. From there, in good weather, you can get a fantastic view of large parts of the park. That’s also where he referred to as ‘*our favourite place*’ in the letter I showed you earlier. I’ve been there many times, but I didn’t think I’d get back here so soon.”

“Great! The sun will be up soon,” Jupe said. “We have to go!”

They reached a small depression, which was overgrown with bushes and shrubs. Monica slowed down. “We must be more careful from here on. Our castle people are probably already in the area.”

How right she was. Just behind a bush they discovered MacWeiden’s car. But there was no sign of the two.

“I hope we’re not too late,” Jupiter said.

Pete checked the engine, it was still warm. “They can’t have been here long,” he said, turning to Monica. “How do you actually get up here by car?”

“There is a path, but it’s not very obvious,” she said. “It’s quite a detour and you’ll need an off-road vehicle. Besides, it’s forbidden, because here we are again on the grounds of the park.”

Meanwhile, Bob had climbed onto a boulder. “I think I can see her,” he said. “Yes, that must be them. They’re on their way to the cave. And the sun is about to come up!” He jumped down. “Let’s go! Follow them!”

They ran a bit until they reached the outer end of the valley. Hidden behind some bushes they stopped. In front of them they went over stones and rubble to Samuel’s Cave. They watched as MacWeiden and her servant reached the cave entrance and looked around. Discontented Bob turned to Jupiter. “We’re too late. What shall we do?”

“Let’s watch them,” Jupiter suggested. “This is the only thing that makes sense now. We don’t have the statue anyway.”

“You’re right. Let them find the manuscript first. Then we’ll surprise them somehow and steal it from them.” Bob looked around. “By the way, where is Pete?”

“Here he comes,” said Monica and pointed to the back.

Pete came jogging in. “Well, any ideas?” he asked.

Jupiter shook his head. "Not yet. We'll wait and see."

They looked up the hill. The sky above the rock already glowed yellow-red, but the sun had not yet appeared above the mountain top.

"Watch what happens inside the cave," Jupiter said. "The sun's coming up soon."

When Peg MacWeiden took out the statue from a bag, it flashed up when the sunbeam briefly fell on its mirror. "My king," sighed Bob.

MacWeiden and George went into the cave and looked up and down around the area of the crevice on the ceiling. Then on the ground, they used their legs to brush the sand away. The servant squatted down, placed Bob's statue on the ground to face a particular position. He seemed satisfied, and both of them waited.

"Apparently, only one statue is involved," hissed Jupiter.

The sun was slowly rising, and The Three Investigators waited patiently for the spectacle that Jupe and Bob had already seen in the painting at the Black Tower.

Then the time came. The sun has risen to such a position that a beam of light came through the crevice in the cave ceiling and shone down to the statue. The mirror on the statue reflected the ray of sunlight in such a way that it shone out of the cave to a small rock plateau a short distance away.

Both of them ran out immediately following the direction of the reflected ray of light and climbed up the opposite hill to the plateau. As inconspicuously as possible, the detectives and Monica moved to a new observation post from which they had a good view of the two.

"There might be where the manuscript is hidden," Jupiter suspected and pulled Bob further behind the bush. "But let's just stay here for the time being."

Meanwhile, MacWeiden and her servant searched the plateau and soon seemed to have found something. Anyway, they squatted down and removed the sand on top of the rock.

The four tried to observe as much as possible. Monica had also resigned to the fact that Peg MacWeiden would get the reward now. "But Glen really made her work for it," she remarked.

Suddenly Peg and George stood up. Peg turned to face the sun with her hands on her hips, while George was toddling back and forth like a predator behind bars.

"What happened there?" murmured Bob.

"I don't know," said Jupiter. "They don't seem to have the manuscript."

Pete nodded. "I didn't see them pick anything up."

Monica laughed. "You know what? I think Glen set her up!"

"It looks like it," said Jupiter.

MacWeiden and her servant came stomping down the path again and went into the cave. Peg came out holding the statue. Then they appeared to leave the area and their path led them straight to the detectives.

When they were only a few metres away, Jupiter stepped out of the bushes and surprised them.

"Good morning, milady," he said solemnly. He savoured the moment. "Does milady like the fresh air?"

Pete and Bob stepped next to him, then Monica too. "Well, we're not ghosts," grinned Bob.

"You're here?" Peg MacWeiden babbled. She looked at her servant who stood beside her, speechless and rooted to the ground. "Well, well, George, our little fatso here has done it. And they also brought the third comrade with them. And that witch from the National Park."

George found his voice again. "How did you get out of the dungeon? And how did you get here so fast?"

Jupiter smiled. "Before we tell you this, this fatso has a few questions for you."

MacWeiden gave a sarcastic grin. "Go ahead, my friend, it doesn't matter to us anymore."

Jupiter nodded understandingly. "We watched you use the statue to find the hiding place of Glen MacHeart's manuscript. Presumably, Glen marked the position of the statue there precisely." He could tell from the servant's expression that he was right. "But what happened up there? The manuscript was obviously not there?"

Peg MacWeiden smiled at him obliquely. "No, Porky Pig. We haven't found the manuscript. And there is only one consolation for me—you will not get it either. Here, you can have your king back!" She gave George a sign and the servant threw the statue to Bob.

"Enjoy it," said George. "Bring it back to Johnny. Isn't that who you're here for?"

Jupiter nodded. So there was a Johnny after all. "In a way, yes," he replied to the servant's question. "What have you done to him?"

Peg was looking at George. "Johnny? It's too long a story... I just can't stand his company." She obviously didn't feel like going into detail about it.

Jupiter was not yet satisfied. "Now what was up on that rock?"

"Go and read it yourself," George interfered. "You ghosts!" Then he turned his evil eye on Monica. "So, witch, back to hunting poachers?"

Monica pretended not to have heard anything and looked demonstratively into the sky. The sun shone down warmly.

"I'll get you," she muttered so softly that only Pete could hear it.

"Mr George, your tone of voice leaves a lot to be desired," Jupiter said dryly. "But back to you, milady—so Glen put you through the torture to get back at you. Isn't it true that you made a lot of money on *Valley of Tears* but are no longer allowed to market the ending?"

Peg nodded. "Yes. It made me a lot of money. But that guy knew how to delay the ending until the contract expired. I could have used the money."

"For your Scottish hobby?" Jupiter asked.

George looked at Peg. "Take it easy, milady. Let's go. We no longer have to put up with this low-class society."

"Yes, George, I guess you're right," she said stiltedly. "But now tell me, how did you get out of my tower?"

Jupiter smiled. "Hocus pocus," he said. "The ghosts helped us."

George smiled tortured. "Very funny."

"No sir, of course not," Jupiter said, "Actually, we started a small fire. We hope we did not do too much damage to your castle."

Peg MacWeiden cried out. "What!" She didn't seem to come up with an appropriate threat in a hurry. "Come on, George," she said briefly. "We must see to it immediately!"

"Very well, milady." The two ran away frantically in the direction of the car.

The three detectives grinned. "You'll hear from us about the false imprisonment," cried Jupiter after them.

Jupiter then led the group into the cave. There he saw a mark on the ground when the beam had shone earlier. It was a triangular indentation on the rock surface that matches the base of the statue. "So, that was how the statue was positioned. Pretty neat!" Jupiter remarked.

Then they started the ascent to the plateau together with Monica. They finally wanted to know whether the search for the manuscript had actually been the search for nothing.

## 16. The Bear Hunter

Bob enjoyed the morning sun, which shone down warmly on him. He was also happy to be able to carry the little king again. He had really got used to him.

Jupiter walked just a few metres ahead of him and Bob accelerated his pace a little. When he caught up with his friend, he asked Jupiter, "Why did you tell MacWeiden and her servant that we had set a fire in the tower?"

"Just a little joke," puffed Jupiter. The climb gave him a hard time. "After the way they mocked us, we finally got one back on them. It's their own fault if they can't take a joke..."

Bob smiled. "Anyway, it made fire under their butts."

A few minutes later, they reached the small plateau from which MacWeiden and her servant had come down from, and something immediately caught their eye. On the rock face at ground level there was a wooden plaque with an inscription on it. Glen's carved characters were not easy to decipher and so Monica read the message out loud:

*Congratulations! It's probably you, Peg, you heartless witch. Or you, Johnny, if you haven't drown in your urine.*

*You won't believe how sorry I am. Neither of you will get the last manuscript.*

*Have I disappointed you now? But why should you feel any different from how I felt after all these years...*

*Greetings,  
Glen*

"Monica looked up. "Just as I thought," she said. "He made them search for days and days, and in the end there's nothing. Serves them right."

Disappointed, Pete looked at his friends. "Then unfortunately Jupiter's fascinating theory is wrong," he said sullenly. "It would have been too good to be true. Actually, we haven't been able to get anything on this case. Neither do we know what happened to Johnny, nor have we found the manuscript..."

"Not necessarily," said Jupiter so determinedly that the others looked at him expectantly. "Monica," he asked, "please show me again the letter Glen wrote you."

"Gladly." She pulled it out of her pocket and handed it to the First Investigator.

He unfolded the paper. "Listen again to what Glen wrote to Monica," he said. "It says here: '*We've actually already said goodbye.*' So why does he write to her again anyway? Probably because he still has something to say. He goes on to write that he wants to meet Monica again sometime."

Jupiter smiled at her. "It's understandable. Okay. And now: '*I hope that you will soon hike to our favourite place and take a look at the little paradise of Kings Canyon that we both like so much.*' And then he uses the phrase '*our dream*'. This is all very unusual."

"That's not unusual, Jupiter," said Monica. "He really liked this place."

"Surely you would have come back here sometime anyway," Jupiter said. "But he hoped that you will soon hike to your favourite place. Why does he care so much about you going

there soon? And then what about your dream?"

"Well, by that he means our desire to expand the park, with particular attention to MacWeiden's land, of course." Monica looked at him. "It takes a lot of money, though. The park is financed by donations from members, from the programmes we offer and from the sale of books and videos. So we don't have that kind of money."

Jupiter nodded. "Right. And I think Glen wants to help you realize your dream." He paused for effect. "My theory is that he wants you to get the manuscript, and you should get it for the park."

Monica was speechless for a moment. "Oh, really?" she said. "And how?"

"First, he played a little game with those people that he dislike but at the end, he had to make sure that you were the only one who could get the manuscript," Jupiter said.

Bob, who had been listening all along, now stepped in: "Monica, think about it. There must be some clue! Where is your favourite spot around here that you used to go with Glen to take a look at the little paradise of Kings Canyon?"

"This area here is our favourite place and it has so many spots," Monica said. "Different spots give you different views of the park and each one is fascinating by itself."

"My guess is that the clues brought us to the cave here, so which is the nearest spot from here?" Jupiter asked.

"Oh wait! I think I get it now! We used to sit over there—beneath those trees," Monica exclaimed and pointed at a hillock a bit further down. "Not only that, there is a flat stone which hides a small compartment where we used to put a few odds and ends. Perhaps we should look in there! I have several of such small hiding places in the park!"

"Kind of a hobby of yours?" Pete remarked.

"You could say that, yes." She smiled.

"There, that must be it," cried Jupiter.

Monica ran to her hiding place and pulled the stone aside. She reached into the hole and took out a metal box of the size of a pencil case.

"This wasn't here before," she said excitedly. Under the curious eyes of the detectives she opened the box and pulled out several folded pieces of paper.

"There is a letter." Monica skimmed the lines, mumbling a few words. Her expression brightened, then she looked at Jupiter.

"Everything you told me is in there, Jupiter. Congratulations!" She smiled at him. "It's Glen's manuscript. I'm supposed to take the papers to the notary in Rocky Beach, who will market the story and transfer the money to the park."

Jupiter leaned back satisfied.

"Not bad, Jupe," Pete said appreciatively. "You've made amends for your mistake."

Bob also smiled contentedly. "Then we'll even get to hear the ending of Glen's prince story."

Pete nodded. "Although I can guess—happy ending and everyone is in each other's arms. After all, Rocky Beach is almost Hollywood."

Monica put the letter and the manuscript back in the box, replaced the flat stone back and all of them walked back down to the cave entrance. Pete then took a few steps forward and looked down to where MacWeiden's car was parked. "I'm going to see if MacWeiden and her servant have really left," he said.

Bob and Jupiter came up beside Pete. Monica put the metal box into her bag and joined them. "Funny, their car is still there," Bob said, frowning.

"There they are," cried Monica. "They're going down the path we came up in the night!"

“Why is that?” Jupiter asked in amazement. “The lady with the fine footwear on such a path?” They watched as MacWeiden and George cautiously crossed the gorge. Soon they were out of sight.

“I have a theory about that,” Pete said stretched out. “But more about that later.”

“Come on, out with it,” Bob demanded.

“Nooo,” Pete whispered and pinched his lower lip forward in alarming fashion. Jupiter tried to ignore this allusion to his habit.

At that moment, Monica heard a sound and she spun around. “Hey! What are you doing here?” she exclaimed.

The three detectives also turned around, startled. Behind them at the edge of the rock stood an old acquaintance who grinned at them.

It was blond Mr Smith, whom Pete had saved from the bear and who had been running into them again and again since they met at the camp site.

“You know, lady, I, uh, I just saw the boys here,” Smith said, baring his teeth. “Those three, they saved me from a bear. I wanted to thank them again.”

Monica was angry, it was obvious to The Three Investigators. “You’re one of those bear hunters that Peg MacWeiden lets roam her land for money,” she shouted angrily. “What did you pay her for this?” She drew her breath. “However, you are now on National Park land! I’m gonna arrest you!”

Smith listened in amusement. “Bear hunter? Lady, I almost believe you’re right.” He looked around. “I wanted to shoot a bear, that’s right,” he said in a remorseful voice.

“But the encounter with the animal yesterday cured me,” he nodded to Pete, “I won’t hunt bears anymore. Never again. I’ll enjoy the landscape for two or three more days, then I’ll be gone. Sorry, lady, you can’t pin anything on me.”

Monica was annoyed. The answer did not suit her, now that she was so close to putting MacWeiden out of business. “Will you at least testify against Peg MacWeiden?” she asked.

“I’ll think it over,” Smith said, and made an effort to leave. “Then I’ll get back to you. I can always find you here at the National Park.” He turned and hurried away. Monica didn’t know what to do, and the detectives were stunned too. There was no reason to hold him back.

While Pete was still pondering about the strong whiff of alcohol that surrounded Smith all the time, Bob suddenly ran in front. “You’ve dropped something, Mr Smith,” he shouted and picked up a small bottle a few metres away. But Smith had already disappeared. Bob looked at the bottle and stopped.

“That guy’s never what you think he is,” Bob said he walked back to the rest. “Not a rock explorer, that was obvious. But I don’t think he’s a bear hunter either. And his name is definitely not Smith!”

“Huh?” Jupiter, Pete and Monica looked at the little bottle that Bob was holding out to them.

“Whisky, so what?” Pete said. “Sure, Smith reeks of alcohol. It suits a guy like that.”

“Johnny Walker,” Jupiter read the label off the bottle. Then he struck his hand on his forehead. “My goodness,” he cried. “Oh, man, Bob, you are a genius!”

Bob calmly accepted the praise. “Marc Walker,” he said. “The newspaper critic who used to pick on Glen. Marc Walker drinks considerable quantities of whisky.”

“Whisky of the well-known brand ‘Johnny Walker’,” Monica added. “Well, perhaps that’s how he got his nickname.”

“... Johnny,” added Pete, who had now also understood it. “Sure. Marc ‘Johnny’ Walker. Glen called him Johnny because he drinks Johnny Walker. This man is the second seeker. And he fooled us all.”

“Fooled you?” asked Monica.

“Right. Jupe was not so wrong with his theory,” said Bob. “Only it’s the other way around—it wasn’t Glen who put us on the trail of the manuscript, but Marc ‘Johnny’ Walker. He wanted us to do the work for him and serve him the manuscript.”

“So he used you!” exclaimed Monica indignantly.

“Wait a minute!” Bob cried suddenly. “Where is the manuscript?”

Monica looked over. “I put it in my bag,” she said quietly.

“I don’t think it’s there anymore,” Bob cried excitedly.

Monica checked her bag and shouted: “The metal case is gone!”



## 17. Johnny

“We’ve gotta go after that guy! Come on, Pete, you’re the fastest,” Jupiter urged to hurry. “We’ll follow you.”

Pete was first off, followed by Monica and Bob. Jupiter looked over the edge of the cliff once more and saw that Johnny was heading towards MacWeiden’s off-road vehicle, which was still abandoned. Jupiter then joined in the chase.

The two in front were really quick, and Monica knew the paths well, and that proved to be a huge advantage as she knew how to corner Johnny. Together, they easily closed in on the journalist. When Johnny was about to reach the car, the fighting duo of Pete and Monica overpowered him. Bob came up and was prepared to intervene if necessary, but there was no reason to do so. Together, Pete and Monica were vastly superior to the journalist. Pete held Marc ‘Johnny’ Walker as Monica snatched back the metal box. Then she tied his hands together for safety just as Jupiter reached the scene.

The First Investigator built himself up in front of Walker and asked his first question: “Mr Marc Walker, we need some answers from you.”

If Marc Walker was surprised to be addressed by his real name, he didn’t let it show. “I won’t tell,” he snorted.

“Gladly,” said Jupiter, “Then I will just talk instead. A few days ago, you received a letter from Glen,” he began. “It’s the Glen whom you made an enemy of through malicious reviews—and probably other things as well.”

“Nonsense,” Walker said.

“In addition, you are pressing many debts,” continued Jupiter, “which stem from your drinking and probably from a gambling addiction associated with it.” It was pure conjecture, but Jupiter wanted to tease Walker.

“Nonsense again,” Walker said. “I’m not a gambler.”

“But you have debts,” said Jupiter contentedly, because he slowly drew Walker into the conversation through his provocations. “You know from Glen’s letter that it would be a showdown between you and Peg MacWeiden. But it was too dangerous for you to take on her, so you came up with a plan.”

“Don’t pretend you know everything,” Walker barked. “You don’t know anything, you stupid boys.”

“Oh, yeah?” Jupiter beamed at him questioningly. “As we now know, Glen’s last letter that is now in our possession says that the money from the manuscript is for the park and Monica is the one to see to it. It was never meant for you or Peg MacWeiden. You stole the manuscript from Monica’s bag so we have a case against you. I suggest that you owe up and tell us everything!”

After a pause, then all of a sudden, Walker started to burst out: “Peg, Glen and I have known each other since school, that’s how it was! Glen didn’t get any money from his parents. They didn’t have any. He walked around in old and torn clothes and of course his classmates teased him. Peg had enough money from her father, who ran a successful publishing house.

“That’s when it started. She started cruel games with Glen, and I joined in. At first, everything was harmless. As a test of courage, Glen was asked to balance over a tree trunk that lay over a stream. We gave him money for it afterwards. Then she persuaded him to shave his head bald in front of the whole class for cash. He did it even though it was hard on him because his family needed money. You know, everybody had long hair back then.”

The Three Investigators nodded.

Walker went on. “Peg and I wanted to see how far we could go with him. Once, I sprayed ink on his new jacket, which his parents had painstakingly saved up for. I did that just for fun. Then he had to start a fire in our teacher’s yard. Well, this and other similar pranks.

“Later, when we left school, Peg took over her father’s publishing company. She hired Glen as a serial writer because he was known to have so much imagination. He was paid a fixed salary no matter how successful his series would be. She promised his parents to support him if the books sold well. But of course, the old witch never stuck to that, because slowly she too got into financial difficulties. Her strange hobby cost her every penny.”

“Scotland,” Bob said.

Walker nodded. “Yeah. She built this artificial home and got herself this wacky valet.” He hesitated a moment. Jupiter suspected what was to come.

“Actually, I wanted to live with her then,” Walker continued. “I also wrote for her publishing house because we still got along well at first. However, my books were not successful although my stories were much better, you have to believe me... Anyway, suddenly the friendship was over and she kicked me out.”

“You began to drink,” said Jupiter. “And you were mad that this Glen nobody suddenly wrote such a successful series...”

Walker got angry. “He’s crap, too. His stories were just a bunch of cobbled-together kitsch. They have absolutely nothing to do with what really happened in Scotland at that time. The English king was not like that. And especially Charlie wasn’t like that. It was a betrayal of good old English history. It was absolutely disgusting!”

“But it’s just a soap opera! You don’t have to take that so seriously,” Jupiter commented. “I also think you were too much into one of the characters, Charlie the Butcher, who is chasing the prince.” Jupiter looked at him expectantly.

Walker made a throwing head movement. “Oh!”

Apparently Jupiter had hit the mark and said: “So when you got the letter from Glen, you thought maybe he wanted to get back at you. But what you were most afraid of was confronting Peg.”

Walker nodded. “I suspected that Glen’s goal was to set us against each other. But then I checked with the notary anyway. He confirmed with me that he really had the task to help the bearer of the manuscript with the marketing. From that point on, I wanted it. But because of Peg, I had to come up with something.”

Bob took the floor. “So you thought, why not let others search for you? For example The Three Investigators. You have heard of us.”

Jupiter continued: “So you thought about how you could get us to do this. You sent us yours and Glen’s letter through the boy on the beach, staged the failed hand-off. The red wig of the woman in the rental car should lead us on the trail of Peg MacWeiden. Peg should be at the centre of our considerations from the beginning.”

“And then you cut the tyres on my MG,” said Pete, and the anger about that rose up in him again. “Wasn’t that a little too much? I mean, maybe that would get us really hot on the case.”

“I guessed you correctly,” Walker said. He was right about that, though.

“We drove off and you simply followed us,” Jupiter continued. “You knew from Glen’s letter that it would take us to Kings Canyon.”

“You bought a tent even though you don’t know anything about camping,” Pete remembered the badly erected tent.

Jupiter pointed to the elongated bag that Walker was still carrying. “And in there—no, don’t tell me—that is not a rifle, but a telescope. You’ve been watching us the whole time.”

It was Bob’s turn again. “Near the cabin, you watched us pitch the tent and set up the trip wires. To predict our next moves, you stole the second manuscript that night.”

Walker nodded. “I knew you were good. I was hoping you weren’t too good, though. And one thing’s true—my plan almost worked.”

Jupiter had to agree with him on this point. “That’s right, you showed real nerve, waiting till the end. And then just throw away that tell-tale bottle of whisky...”

“Tragic,” Pete grinned.

“And by the way, aramite is not a rare rock, it’s a pesticide!” Jupiter remarked.

“And Monica will be taking the manuscript to Mr Pallister,” Bob said, “Then the money goes to the National Park.”

Walker moaned. “Classic Mike.”

“Mike?” Jupiter asked. “Who’s Mike?”

“Mike Vernon, that’s Glen’s real name.”

“Mike Vernon? That’s Glen?” Jupiter remarked, surprised. “Vernon is the man from Rocky Beach—who supposedly has a psychology practice.”

“And who always shows up at the beach to talk to the bathers,” Bob remarked. “We just saw him a few days ago!”

“Yes,” Walker added. “He does that to get new ideas from people. He then incorporates them into his disgusting stories. He probably hasn’t thought of anything else to say for a long time...”

The Three Investigators looked at each other in surprise.

“I think Vernon is all right,” Bob said. “I’ve always said that.”

They nodded. “But we probably won’t be able to see this original in Rocky Beach once he has emigrated to Canada,” Pete said.

“Well, too bad,” Jupe said. “Okay, any more questions?”

Pete and Bob shook their heads.

“Oh yes. There’s one more thing, Mr Walker,” Jupiter said. “You were planning to drive off in this car, but anyway, I see that the key is not there. You couldn’t have made it far anyway!”

“Even if the key is there, he couldn’t have driven off,” Pete quipped.

“What do you mean, Pete,” Bob asked.

Pete pulled a car cable out of his jacket pocket. “Quite simply, he couldn’t,” he said. “Neither did MacWeiden and her castle ghost. I have the crucial cable.”

“You got that thing out of the car?” Jupiter stared at him in disbelief. “That was why the two of them abandoned it and walked back!”

“It was just a little safety precaution of mine when we passed that car on the way up...” He went to the car and opened the bonnet under the appreciative looks of Bob and Monica. “I’ll fix that in a minute,” he said.

“And what’s the use when we still do not have the key?” Monica asked.

Bob interrupted: “Well, that’s our Pete. He knows something about cars!”

“Kind of a hobby of yours?” Monica asked.

“Yes, definitely!” Pete shouted back. After he fixed the cable back, he got out some tools from the boot and began to fiddle with some connections to hot-wire the car. A while later, the engine started.

“Wonderful!” Jupiter said. “At least we don’t have to walk back!”

“Well, let’s get out of here!” Monica said.

“But there are only four seats in the car,” Walker remarked.

“That’s good enough,” Pete said and counted: “Monica, Bob, Jupe and I, that’s four. Mr Walker, you may walk.”

Bob agreed. “This is really a harmless punishment, considering the danger you put us in.” He went to Walker to untie him.

Pete got behind the wheel. The rest got on and they were off.

## 18. A New Case?

After they had driven for a while, Pete reached the lake they had seen at night. Now the sun was burning down on the water. Pete stopped the car near the shore. "A good place for a break," he said. "And we've really earned it now."

In the car they found a few bottles of juice and a family pack of chocolate cookies. Although that was not a proper breakfast, it was an encouraging late breakfast. After all the food supplies were eaten, Bob suggested that Monica read the rest of the manuscript.

She agreed and pulled out the slips of paper. "Unfortunately, I'm not very good at reading. It's not exactly my hobby."

"It should be good enough for us," said Pete, while he dangled his feet in the water. Jupiter nodded and Bob placed the little king next to him, so that the mirror directed a ray of sunlight onto the manuscript in Monica's hands.

The parts of the story they already knew were skipped by the ranger. Monica read how the prince managed to escape to America together with Helen. Charlie the Butcher, fell victim to an ambush he had organized himself.

The prince and Helen started a big family in the new country. In the end they sat at sunrise on their impressive ranch.

"*"Delicately, he placed his hand on hers and they looked expectantly into the new land of their dreams. They kissed for a long time."*,," Monica concluded. Her voice sounded slightly husky. She pushed the slips together.

"My tears are coming," commented Jupiter ironically.

"I like it," Bob said. He had slightly glazed eyes.

Pete, who noticed this, wondered whether Bob's wet look was a result of the story or fatigue. "Told you it would end like this," he commented and pulled his feet out of the water.

Jupiter stretched himself. "Okay, Monica, best you keep the manuscript and bring it to Mr Pallister in the next few days."

"Sure, I will." She put the papers back in the metal box. "Then I'll come and visit you. And thanks again."

"And this coming weekend, we'll look out for Chris, the little boy who delivered Walker's letter to us," Bob said, "and tell him what a great adventure it turned out to be."

"You bet." Pete nodded. "Especially now that I'm back in shape." He gave Monica a friendly punch on her arm. "Hey, cowgirl, why do you look so serious?"

"Well, I still haven't caught the poachers, and I haven't caught Peg."

Pete put his arm around her shoulder as a friend. "Why don't you call a detective agency," he said, blinking around.

"Yes, they'll help you!" Bob looked at her defiantly. "I know a good..."

"An overly good one," explained Jupiter. "Real professionals. I just happen to have one of their business cards on me." He rummaged about in his pockets. "Ah, here it is. Look, it even says here that they'll investigate anything. So you have a good chance!"

Monica smiled at first, then she started to laugh.

"Okay, give me the card. I'm gonna check with these people. Hope they're not as quick-witted as you are." She grinned at the detectives. "And hopefully they're not afraid of

bears...”

“No way,” Bob said. “They love bears.”

With a played bow, Jupiter gallantly handed her the card and Monica accepted it like a great treasure she had been waiting for a long time. It read:

